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Mad Sanity

Chapter 1

"No I don't want it." Ariana was as stubborn as the rest of her family even in her illness that was for sure.

Albus could not wait for Aberforth to get back from Hogwarts. Even though he knew he should not load his sister of to his brother it was easier. She adored Aberforth, and to Ari he could do no wrong. He'd be back that evening thankfully.

"Fine." Said Albus as he took the food tray away before she hit it away like she had the day before, with out even touching it. It was no good to try and force her to eat.

"Albus?"

"Yes Ariana?" he said trying to keep contempt for her out of his voice.

"When are mama and papa coming home?"

He softened towards her in that moment considerably and took hold of her hand. After all this time she didn't understand their father wasn't going to be coming home, or that she had accidentally killed their mama.

He squeezed her hands, sighed and kissed her forehead but she leant away from his comfort. She didn't trust him to comfort her. Not like she did their other brother.

Ever since those bastard's had wrecked her life...

"I want papa!" she said to him.

"I know you do Ariana."

She had been their fathers little girl before every thing had gone on. He had doted on her. Much the way Aberforth did now when he was home. Albus how ever did not have the patience.

He sat with her for a while and held her hands.

She was a sweet little girl really he thought. She just didn't understand...and that was not her fault. He had to remind himself of that.

"Shall we try some of this soup now Ari, its tomato, your favourite!" he said to her forcing a smile waiting for her reaction.

She nodded, and ate it all with his help. It had cooled and was not too hot. By the end of it she was positively worn out. Before he had left the room she was asleep.

He paused for a moment to look at her. She had been through so much for some one as young as she was. He knew to get angry with her was not right. It wasn't fair. None of it.

His bright eyes trace her pale face.

She had chestnut brown hair and when she had eyes open, they were as blue as his. It was a mirror image.

Again, he kissed her forehead with a gentle affection before going down stairs to find his friend Gellert waiting for him.

"Was she being difficult?"

"Not really. She is having a good day believe it or not. Asked after dad again though."

"How many times do you have to tell her?" with annoyance in his voice.

"Don't. It isn't her fault she can't understand." He said protectively. He didn't like it when his friend spoke about her like that.

“Sorry.”

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“Can I go up and see Ariana?” that was the first thing that Aberforth asked when he got back. Albus nodded.

Running up the stairs two at a time he was anxious to see her. He always was. He knew Albus didn’t look after her as their mother had. He thought it was below him, the brilliantly clever young wizard that he was.

The first thing he noted was that she was thinning out again. Well that was no surprise. He was the only one who could persuade her to eat at times.

Taking her hand gently, as not to disturb her from her slumber he kissed it. He had missed her so much it had hurt.

“I’m home Ari.” He whispered to her. Her eyes slowly crept open. He could have kicked himself. He had not intended to wake her.

“Aba.” She said, using her own nickname for him.

“Hey...how you feeling?”

“Not well.” She said to him.

“No. Oh dear.” he said to her. “We’re going to have to sort that out.” He said as she moved to let him embrace her. It was good to be home he thought to himself. “I missed you so much dearest, I thought of you every day!”

“Me too...” she said simply.

“Well I am home now for two months, and I can look after you properly.” He promised her.

“Good, I don’t think Al likes looking after me. Or even me at all. I do bad things.” she said.

"No Ariana. You can't help it, you're a good person. And Albus knows it in his heart."

She looked thoughtful for a moment, as if she was trying to order her thoughts. To no avail as usual. Her frustration bubbled over and it wasn't long till she was weeping in to Aberforth's arms.

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"Why don't you leave her with him we can go and find the Deathly Hallows?" asked Gellert.

"Because she is not his responsibility." Albus insisted.

"She is just as much his as she is yours!"

Aberforth sat on the stairs listening in. He hated his brother's friend for what he had said. And what the hell were the Deathly Hallows?

"She's my sister."

"She's crazy, that's what she is!"

"Through no fault of her own."

Aberforth had heard enough. She had got herself in to a right state earlier because she believed her own family hated her. For Albus maybe it wasn't so far from the truth!

"Shut up, both of you shut up!" he yelled as he entered the room.

"Aberforth..." his brother sighed.

"No, golden boy. How can you listen to him?"

"Because he knows I speak the truth!"

"Gallert." Albus warned.

"Take it back!" demanded Aberforth. His voice was deathly low. He drew his wand. Gellert did the same.

"Why? She holds him back, you know she does." he shrugged.

"Stop it both of you!" said Albus.

"No, he is in our mother's house insulting our little sister, why should I? TAKE IT BACK!" he bellowed.

It was then that they begun to duel. Albus felt his heart shatter. Two out of the three people he cared for most were duelling. But it wasn't long till he was fighting by his brother's side. Gallert was a superior in knowledge of spells. Aberforth needed help. with out his brother he stood not chance.

If he had not begun to fight then he might have seen Ariana coming down the stairs. The tiny girl was in her dressing gown and she clutched her goat soft toy to her heart. Aba had given it to her last Christmas.

"Aba, Al stop it!" she pleaded. But it was no good. Spells and sparks flew insanelly back and forth.

She only saw one way to stop it then. To get in the middle. All three boys tried to stop their spells as she tried to interrupt the fight. But it was too late. They all collided with each other and her. Then she was gone from the room.

To be continued.

Please review!

Chapter 2

When Ariana woke, she found herself on the ground. It was undoubtedly outside, and she soon figured out she was in some sort of woodland area.

Getting up, still clutching her goat to her heart, she began to walk. She had to get out of there and then she had to find Aba. He'd know what to do, she was sure.

Her eyes drank the sight of the trees in with wonder. It had been a long time since she had been outside so freely. She remembered when she and her papa had gone on long walks in the country side when she had been a little girl. Where had he gone? Was it her fault he had?

She had been told something she was sure, but her memory – it seemed unable to recall. Her frustration wound her up but she did not cry or throw a tantrum. No one was there to comfort her, or as Al might have said 'put as show on for'.

It was then she heard something. A squeaking. She looked down on the floor to see a rat. It was horrible, dirty looking, but the fur would be soft and wanting to feel it Ariana picked it up, roughly in one hand. It didn't take long before it bit her, upsetting her and making her angry all at once.

She concentrated on her feelings so much that with out explanation when rat hit the floor, it found itself in a small cage. Ari looked at it and had no understanding of how the cage got there, or why the rat was inside of it. She had no idea how powerful she was.

She picked it up, the rat going mad. She had cut off his escape. She walked back the way the animal had been coming. It wasn't long till Ariana came to a clearing. There stood six other people. People she neither knew nor trusted. She had to hide, was her first instinct, but it was too late. One of them had seen her.

She cowed into the grass behind as he approached her.

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Sirius walked towards the little girl with the rat in her hands. She had caught him! What a girl she was in his opinion already...but the poor little thing looked terrified of him as he approached her. She was small and a little too on the thin side he could tell even with her dressing gown on. At a guess he thought she was a first year. A scared one at that. Of what, he didn't know.

"Hello." He said to her gently. "Can I have that rat?"

She nodded and just wanted to be left alone. So she gave it to him. What if he thought her a freak like those boys had, when she had been back home, for doing magic? She hadn't known how or why...or anything.

"Al." she muttered to him, as tears of fear glistened in her eyes. Sirius could no way leave a child like this.

"Who's Al?" he asked gently.

"Aba..." she said weakly.

"Aba...what?"

"Black, Lupin!" he heard Snape cry behind him.

"Not now." He turned to see his friend...the transformation had begun.

"Listen, you need to trust me...go with my friend here, and he can look after you!"

She looked at him. His friend looked neither friendly nor kind. She didn't want to go. She wouldn't! Her mother had told her not to go with strangers.

"NO!" she yelled with a pure terror taken her body as she turn and tried to run in to the forest. She didn't want to be hurt again. She wouldn't be able to bear it.

Sirius throw Scabbers to Harry before tearing off after the child. But as he caught her, his hands begun to burn. She turned and he saw tears were flowing freely down her face now.

What magic was protecting her? And what had happened to make her so scared?

There was no time to figure it out. He had to try and control Moony.

“Snape take the others back up to the castle,” he said as he looked with affection towards his godson. He believed him! They were going to be a family.

And because of that little girl he had met they had proof he was telling the truth. He had to protect her. Though now she was in the forest that was going to be harder. He owed her.

Ariana run on though, crying desperately for her parents or her brothers. She needed them more than ever.

She tripped and fell down in her panic though, hitting her head hard. She was soon unconscious, the tiny goat still in her hands.

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“Describe her to me.”

This was the day he had been waiting for, for over a hundred years. If his suspicions were right, then his sister was at last safe.

“She was tiny, pale, didn’t look very well. She was in her bed clothes and had a toy.” Hermione said to the headmaster. Why the girl was of so much interest to him she didn’t know though.

“Was the toy a little stuffed goat?” he asked.

“Well I didn’t get a close enough look to say for sure but it could have been, yes.”

"It's her. I know it is." He said to them, confusing them. "Poppy," he called.

"Yes Albus."

"Can you send a message to Aberforth? Tell him to come to the school, if he asks why just say Ariana. He'll understand." Her turned back to the Gryffindors.

"She run in to the forest?" he checked though. He had been told so by them already but he had to make sure.

"Yes."

Then he had to get in there after her. He refused to let her down again.

"Sir, what about Pettigrew?" he asked.

He looked at the rat in the change, who seemed to be distressed. "I think he can wait till his olds friends return. We can deal with him in the morning." Said the Headmaster to his students and rushed out of the hospital wing. His sister was his one and only concern at that moment.

She wasn't safe in the forest. He had to get her out.

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When Ariana awoke she found her head pained her greatly. She hadn't hurt herself like it in a long time.

Suddenly she very cold though. She felt cold in her heart. Every good memory she did have and could remember was gone. Happiness was so foreign to her in that moment.

"ARIANA! ARIANA!" she smiled some one had come to for her.

Turning she saw an old man coming towards her. He was...familiar. She let him approach; her heart telling her he could be trusted.

She looked in to his eyes as he bent down in front of her. She was right. She did know him.

“Albus?” she whispered.

“Thank god you’re ok.” He said as he cupped her face gently. He had been dreaming of this for so long. “My darling sister.” He said

She did nothing but smiled. His appearance didn’t seem to faze her what-so-ever.

“You know who I am don’t you?” he checked.

“Of course. You’re my big brother.” As if it was obvious. After all this time...

“Good.” He said as he picked her up. He had to get her away from the Dementors. She buried her head in his neck, letting him comfort her. It scared her slightly, him being so close, but that was nothing compared to the fear she had felt earlier that day.

“Where’s Aba?”

He smiled through the happy tears that had been streaming down his face since he had seen alive and as well as could be expected.

“He is on his way, he’s coming Ariana.”

Please review!

Chapter 3

When the nurse had sent word to him, only half of Aberforth had dared to wish, and dream that maybe he had found her. This was not the first time they had thought they had got her back and then it always turned out not to be her. Every time...

He and Albus rarely spoke of the sister now that they had harmed so that day when she had been so young. When she had been an innocent and Aberforth had never stopped blaming his brother or himself. When she had cried out...if only he had stopped...if only they all had...

Going up to his brother's office he discovered he was not there, but in the hospital wing. He was out of breath by the time he got there (as he had run all the way from the Hogs Head). Stopping outside he took a deep breathe, knowing if she was not there his heart was going to break all over again. Still he was used to it by now.

Going in, to his right he saw two boys on the left in bed. A bushy haired girl was sitting in between them. They looked a bit worse for wear.

"Is Professor Dumbledore here?" he asked nervously.

They pointed to a bed that had a screen round it. He before stopped for a moment going in. Please...let it be her...

He walked in. It was. It was his little Ariana.

She was sitting up in bed with Albus by her side. She seemed comfortable and happy though pale and drawn, her little eyes read from crying. She was looking at their elder brother before he came in but as he approached her it seemed she still had eyes only for him.

He sat on the edge of her bed and took her hand. It was just like old times. Whether that was a good thing or not, he didn't know.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

“Not so bad. Where’s papa?” she asked. Both brothers had almost forgotten that was her favourite question. A sad, sympathetic smile appeared on both their faces.

“He can’t come here sweetheart.” Said Albus and she seemed to accept it. There was a sadness in her eyes though.

Ever since he had entered the room though Aberforth had not looked at his brother once. Only his sister. He had been so close to giving up hope of this day ever coming. He had thought...well he didn’t know. There had been a thousand places she could have been when she had disappeared from the room. Thank god she had come here. To her brothers. Straight back to his arms where he thought she belonged.

“We’re going to take care of you properly this time.” He promised her gently. No matter what he was going to hold true too that. Nothing came before the three of them now.

“Are you sad Aba?” she asked gently. He smiled. She didn’t know how many times he had dreamt he had heard her call out to him by that name. It fell upon his ears like the sweetest music.

“No, why would I be sad? I’ve got you back.”

“But you’re crying.”

“Well when people are happy they cry some times.” He said to her smiling. She looked confused by that, so shook her head at least back in to her pillows.

“Has she eaten?” He asked Albus.

“Tomato soups on the way.” He smiled.

“Again?” asked Ariana.

“What?” asked Albus.

“I had tomato soup for lunch.”

"Of course you did." He said to her. He had made it for her on the day of the argument. That was mere hours ago for her. Yet it had been decades for him. "What would you like to eat Ari?"

"Toast." She declared.

"Then toast it is." He smiled. "What would you like on it?"

"Just butter." she said.

"Ok," he said as she leant back again, shutting her eyes.

It was quite a job for them both brothers when the toast came to make her wake up and eat it. She was too tired and only got through a couple of mouthfuls in the end.

She was soon peacefully asleep, her brothers by her side and whilst it had been as if she had never been away from them for her, it was the biggest relief ever for them. She was...back, from the dead it seemed.

"How did she get that graze on her head?" asked Aberforth noticing where she had hit her head on the rock.

"Must have hit it in the forest." Albus guessed. He wasn't sure.

"Do you think she is ok? I mean a minute ago, to her, we were teenagers and now we're old men and she doesn't bat an eye lid. It makes no sense."

"I know. I don't understand it either. Shall we let her sleep and head up to my office?" he asked and he nodded, kissing her gently on her forehead before they both left, passing Ron, Hermione and Harry who were all asleep on the way on.

"So what now?" asked Aberforth as they got back in to the office. "Is she going to come back to the Hogs Head with me?" he asked hopefully. He would gladly take care of her for all of his days now.

Albus paused. He had a thoughtful look on his face. "Maybe, but I think we should look in to our options first..."

"What St Mungo's?"

"No, never! Our mother worked so hard to keep her out that place, you don't seriously think I'd just give her over. You forget I love her dearly too." There was a clear offence in his voice. "You're not the only one who is glad to see her safe you know."

"Of course I do. I'm sorry Albus. I don't know why I said that. Forgive me brother." He begged and Albus smiled gently. Of course he would. That day had caused so many old and new emotions to stir in both brothers.

"What I meant by our options was the...society has changed so much in the past 100 years. And if we show her magic can be a good thing, then maybe we can cure her of her fear. If she is at Hogwarts learning with others, she wouldn't feel as if she were strange or weird, or wrong." He suggested, wanting the best for her. "I imagine we can make her control her magic more."

"I don't know," he said to him drawing a long breathe. "It's certainly ambitious." He said. He only wanted her to be safe. Nothing more or less...

"Yes it is. I want her to have the life she so deserves. I want her pain to end." He admitted. Nothing else mattered it seemed. The two brothers were united in there dreams for there sister but unable to agree on how to achieve them it seemed.

Aberforth sat down by his brother. What he was saying made a lot of sense. With Albus as headmaster there was going to be no trouble getting her on to the schools register. But the ministry...that was an obstacle.

"When the ministry find out what happened they are going to be involved." He said to him.

“Yes, but I hardly think Fudge is going to start a quarrel with me. He needs my advice too much.” He said, and he knew he sounded arrogant but it was true. “That won’t be a problem.”

“As long as she is protected, I’ll agree. But only if she can, I don’t want pressure on her.” he said fiercely protective.

“Then we want the same things.”

“Well let’s face it neither of us want her to go back to the way she was living before,” Aberforth nodded. “Ok, as long as she is comfortable, safe and happy, I’ll help.”

Please review!!!

Chapter 4

"Who was she though Dumbledore, that girl who caught Peter? I owe her my freedom." Said Sirius. To say that Albus was proud of his sister was an understatement. She had changed people's lives for the better already since she had 'come back'. So much for the better.

"She is someone I knew a long time ago. I am sure now that you are a free man, you will meet her again this summer but for now, she is someone who needs a lot of peace." Said the Headmaster, not wanting to give too much information away.

"She seemed very scared and agitated," He nodded, remembering the state he had found her in. And his hands had burnt when he had touched her.

"She was. She often was when I knew her..." he sighed. Things were going to be better this time.

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The idea of reintroducing magic into Ariana's life in a positive way grew on Aberforth the more he considered it. He really did think it was going to be the best thing for her. But not yet. They had to readjust to having her back.

Whatever was going to happen was also going to have to wait till the other students had gone for the summer. Then the Dumbledores could get back on track, properly. For now though, as the students sat in class, Aberforth sat with his sister by the lake, getting some fresh air. She was still carrying the toy he had given her, all those years back like a life line but was sitting next to him, resting her head on his arm contently, her tiny fingers clutching a bit of his shirt, as if trying to make sure he could never leave her.

"Aba?" she asked.

"Yes dearest?"

“Why do you and Al look so like papa now? Do I look like mama?” she asked and he understood the true meaning of her question.

Why was it he had grown old and so had their brother, if so was she old as well?

“Because there had been – well I think we can talk to Albus about it later.” He said to her. “No, you don’t like mama. And the reason we look so like papa – we’re a bit older than you know. Older than we were before!”

“But –“ she said to him. “Did some thing happen? When the horrible boy was at home? I didn’t like him...Can we go back?” she asked innocently.

“Yes...he did something.” He nodded, knowing she was talking about there brothers old best friend. But so had the two brothers and the guilt he felt still hurt him. Even if he had her back. There was no way he should have let it happen. “No...sorry Ari I don’t think we can. Me and Albus have new homes now.” He told her. “Different homes.” He added, so it was made clear to her.

“Well can I come and live with you then?” She said to him.

“If that is what you want.” He nodded.

“It is.”

“Good.” He smiled, making her giggle. He was glad she wanted him close by still, but then he had always been her favourite brother and person in the world, she had said when she had been really young. That wasn’t so any more though. In August she was going to be fifteen even if she only looked around the age of ten. He didn’t believe it.

“Do you think it is all going to be ok now?” he asked.

“What’s ‘all’ Ariana?” he asked.

“Am I going to do bad things?”

"You have never done bad things." He said to her seriously. He firmly believed that. And even if she had it was through no fault of her own. She had to understand that...if only she could.

"Listen Ari, me and Al are here now. Gallert is gone, he is never coming back. It really is just the three of us from now on."

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Ariana was surprisingly good over dinner that night. She and Aberforth dined at Hogwarts and they had a splendid meal. Ariana ate a moderate portion of dinner and he didn't even have to nag her to finish it. They ate in Albus's quarters, so as not to rouse suspicion in the Great Hall, but it worked in vice versa too. Albus had to eat with the staff and so the three were split for their evening meals, but the headmaster would have far rather be with his siblings in those early days. He desperately wanted to bond with Ariana again.

By the time that Albus had got back to his quarters, he found his brother covering his sister's tired body with a blanket where she had fallen asleep on the sofa. She looked like an angel to him. So innocent...

"Fire whiskey brother mine?" he asked after Aberforth and he were done with small talk.

"Don't mind if I do." He responded not moving from where he sat on the sofa by Ari's side. It was as if he was terrified some one was going to take her from him once again if he left her for a second.

"How has she been today?"

"Amazing." He muttered. "Really on form. I don't think she understands what's gone on or why we look like we do but she is not scared I don't think," he told his elder brother.

"Good. She doesn't have to be. There is nothing to be scared of." He said inwardly kicking himself for all the things he had done in the past.

“Not any more.”

The brothers smiled at one another. Things were going to be ok somehow.

“I have been talking to a few friends and making enquires of how she may get better.” Said Albus.

“You have, so soon?” he asked.

“Well, yes if we are going to get her ready to go to class in September we needed to move fast.”

“What class is she going to be joining when she starts? We could pass her off as a first year. She could start at the beginning.” He suggested.

“Maybe but I think it is going to be best for her if she joins people her own age in fourth year. Obviously she is not going to be able to understand every thing so maybe we should just let her take five subjects and let the rest of her time be for studying them.”

“You’ve worked it all out haven’t you?”

“Not at all Aberforth.” He said honestly. What had gone on over the past few days, it was well out of his comfort zones and he had no idea why it had happened.

“Well I don’t know. Is sending her here even for the best?”

“That I do know. Yes. She needs to be with people who can make her realise her magic is a good thing.”

“She needs people she trusts about her.”

“I’ll be here.” He said to him. “You’re in Hogsmeade. She has people she trusts near.”

“I know, but – you’re right.”

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Harry and Sirius walked round the grounds talking. Sirius had very good news for his god son.

"I have been offered the post of flying teacher here at Hogwarts so I am going to be here all next year for you." He told him.

"That's brilliant." He responded.

"I know I can't wait." He said to him. When he had left Hogwarts he had been so eager to get out, to live. He didn't know why he was so glad to be back. Well yes he did. He was free and he had his god son close. "Now plans for the holidays. You have to go back to your aunt and uncles for at least a week." He said to him.

"What? Why?" he asked.

Sirius thought about the charm that had been placed upon Harry by Lily when she had died for him. Dumbledore had explained it and there was no way to get round it.

"Do as I say, not as I do Harry, please just trust me on this one." he asked him. "After that though, we are going to come back here, and have the run of the castle for most of the summer." He told him and that seemed to cheer Harry up but not much. "The Dumbledores are going to be here, but that's it."

"Alright then..." He shrugged, not wanting to rock the boat, but he wanted to know why he had to go back when Sirius had said they were going to be a family now.

So why couldn't he just stay on here and not bother going back? What didn't he know?

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Thanks to every one who is reviewing, it is appreciated!

Please review!

Chapter 5

Ariana was so child like, more so than other fourteen year olds.

Subconsciously, both brothers had thought that she might have grown up since they had last been together, in the time that had passed for them but of course it hadn't for her. She was still the same girl she had been one hundred and fifty years ago.

They had forgotten how much hard work she could be though.

On the third day of there reunion she got rather upset over there fathers absents and she accidentally made one of the windows blow up in her brothers office.

After that though the silence came. After she had seen what she had done she always went deadly quite, Albus remembered. After she had accidentally caused there mother's death she had sat on her bed for hours rocking herself back and forth. He should have been there for her and comforted her himself looking back, but he had been so wrapped up in his own grief to notice her. If he had held her at that moment... How different things could have been for their relationship...

This display of her magic made her brothers surer of what they had decided though. She had to learn self control.

"I'm sorry Albus." she said to him.

"Ari its ok." He said to her gently wrapping an arm round herm which she obviously found very unfamiliar. "We all get a little bit angry some times."

"But – the mess. Mama didn't like mess."

"No, she didn't, did she?" he asked. "Shall we clear it up?"

"Yes." She nodded.

And then Albus took a risk. He drew his wand and fixed it magically. He saw her tense instantly. He should have wanted for Aberforth. Albus was no better at reassuring her yet than the seventeen year old version of himself had been. But he was so eager for her to start her journey back to her right mind...

"See Ari, what I just did?" he asked and she nodded.

"M-m-mag-i-c." she stuttered.

"Yes. And it fixed the window. Its good thing, don't you think?" he asked but she shook her head, clearly too panicked to think straight. She turned and made for the door, but before she got there it was opened any way, and Aberforth walked through, his smile vanishing as he saw her upset.

Ariana run in to his arms, shaking. He picked her up and settled her in to his arms, her tiny body clinging to his, shaking.

"What's wrong sweet?" he asked in to her ear, trying to figure out what had got her so uptight when she had been relaxed when he had left her last, but she shook her head, so he sat down ion one of the comfortably chairs in his brothers great office and cuddled her. In time she had fallen so quiet, almost to sleep, so their brother could explain to Aberforth what had happened.

Aberforth sighed. Well, Albus had tried. He had made the first step, and though she had been panicked, she seemed to calm rather quickly, which if she had been in one of her real states she wouldn't have. There was no going back though. She had to realise...magic was a good thing and part of who she was.

"Ari?" he said to her quietly, almost in a whisper. His voice was laced with love for her, as ever and she responded by looking up at him, even offering a small smiling to show she was ok.

"What's your favourite animal?" he asked her.

Instinctively she held out her cuddly toy to him, answering the question silently.

"A goat isn't it?" he said to her, keeping his eye contact with her.

She nodded happily.

"Well watch this." He drew his wand and she tensed, but with his arm wrapped round her, he did some thing no matter how hard Albus tried right then he would never be able to do. Make sure she knew it was ok and safe with out saying a word.

Kissing her check, he formed his Patronus. A white, silvery goat sprung confidently from his wand, and she did some thing neither brother could predict. She giggled.

Looking to him for more reassurance, he nodded and she moved towards the goat slowly, and touched it with the gentle caress she used for almost every thing she felt when she was not upset. Her eyes were alight with amusement, and even though she was biting her lip gentle with nerves, she seemed happy enough with the magic her brother had performed. She seemed to be almost enjoying it.

Soon, she made her way back to his side and he wrapped an arm round her again. The Patronus soon disappeared and he was thinking of other ways to reintroduce magic in to her life which were not going to make her uneasy.

"What about your favourite colour?" he asked.

"Lilac, like mamas skirt the day we went for the picnic with her and papa." She recalled to Aberforth, and he and Albus made eye contact.

Neither had thought of that day for years... it had been a few months before she had been attacked when the Dumbledore's had truly been a happy family. Looking back, silently the two privately thought how special it had been and now it was re-called and they remembered it, it had to be one of their best memories.

"Right, watch this!" he said and aiming at a free clear patch on the wall, he shoot lilac paint over it making her laugh and a few of the portraits of the old head master grumble.

"It'd never happen in my day!" said one of the eldest ones.

Ari continued to laugh.

"What colour now?"

"Green!" she squealed in delight, and again the same thing happened.

Albus watched with a mixed of amusement and jealousy. He wished he knew how to connect with her so easily. And there was nothing he could study and learn about how to bond with his half crazed sister. No way he could learn the skill Aberforth had so naturally.

"What now?" he whispered more quietly.

"Blue!" she giggled, bringing the tone of her voice down to match his.

It was not the wall that was hit though. It was Albus, who immediately began laughing with both his siblings.

"And now Ari?" Aberforth asked.

"Orange!"

He could have predicted what would happen next. He turned Orange. Ariana laughed hysterically.

He looked up at Albus, it was as if the once good brotherly bond that had been between them once, so strong, had been renewed.

The two were so happy to be on speaking terms again and happily, that they got in to a play fight. No longer waiting for there sisters wishes of what colour she would like to see appear next. They shoot at each other, until they realised there sisters laughter had turned to tears.

It reminded her furiously of the night when she had been sent in to the future and had the brothers not been so happy to be acting like real brothers again, they would have thought of that.

-

"All that and it came to nothing."

"I don't know...it showed you weren't afraid of magic, and she'd follow you any where. Your magic will give her confidence with her own."
Said Albus.

"Maybe...I wish we had more solid answers. Just to know..." he said shaking his head. "What would mother says if she could see us now?"

"Just to do your best boys, that's all me and papa want of you."

"Yeah...that's exactly what she'd say." He nodded. "You sounded just like her."

Albus nodded. It was mad, he was over one hundred and fifty years old, but he wanted his mother back. And his father...he missed them.

He was viewed by the world as the immensely clever, self assured Head master of Hogwarts. And he was usually. He could deal with almost every thing, almost any situation. But when it came to his own family, his confidence came crumbling down about him. When he needed to be strongest, he felt nothing but weakness. When he needed knowledge, he felt stupid.

Looking over at Aberforth he wished he had been more like him when they had been young. To enjoy his child hood. He wished he had ignored the text books, and concentrated on the important things.

But it was too late now...and nothing could change the past.

Please review!

Chapter 6

The week which Harry spent with his aunt and his uncle went quickly. Sirius had been staying with Remus for the week, and he picked Harry up from his relatives in early August. The reunion was a happy one. Harry wanted to ask him again as to why he had to go back to the Dursleys every year, but that was going to have to wait for another day.

The day was hot and sunny when they got back to the only place either of them had been able to call home. The green seemed greener and the lake bluer than usual as Harry looked out the window of the North Tower. He was glad to be home.

They were installed into the Gryffindor tower, having all of it to

themselves (happily) for the entire summer. Sirius had chosen the dorm room that had once belonged to the Marauders to sleep in to be their bedroom for the summer period.

Sirius entertained Harry with tales of when the Marauders roamed at Hogwarts for most of the day.

"Your dad, he was the brains of the operation," he said to Harry, as they walked down to the lake that night. "Remus and I were just there to help see it through. More me than Remus though. He was such a goody-goody!"

"But the four - three, I mean, the three of you," Harry corrected

himself, cutting Peter out of the equation. As far as Sirius and Remus were concerned now, Wormtail had never existed. Wormtail was in Azkaban now, doing the time he deserved. That was the end of it. "But the three of you, your friendship-"

Harry was fascinated by the friendship that the Marauders had had before. He knew he was close with Hermione and Ron, but he wasn't sure if it was ever going to be anything like what the Marauders had. He wasn't sure why. Maybe because his father's past was so

refreshingly new to him. Maybe he just wanted to believe his dad and his friends and still was more amazing than anything in the world.

"We were all like brothers. More so than me and Reggie ever were," Sirius confided in him.

"Reggie?" Harry asked.

"My real brother. He was a nasty bit of work, really. A Slytherin."

"Odd one out?" Harry guessed.

"What, Golden Boy Reggie? My mother's pride and joy?" Sirius scoffed. "No, not at all, You've got it wrong - I was the odd one out. I grew up with him and my three cousins, Andy, Bella and Cissy. They were all in Slytherin, though Andy didn't turn out too bad. She was always my favourite cousin, although Cissy was sweet when we were young." Sirius scowled. "I don't know what she's like now. Her marriage was not the one I wanted for her. But anyways, my entire family

was Slytherin, 'cept me."

Harry opened his mouth to ask where 'Reggie' now and why he disapproved of Cissy's (who ever she was) marriage when a giggle

interrupted him. Harry looked up - they'd reached the lake, but it seemed they weren't the only ones out on the school grounds, enjoying the evening peace. Six other people were having a picnic supper - Professor McGonagall, Hagrid (who took up much of the picnic blanket), Madame Pomfrey, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, whose eyes twinkled upon seeing them, and two others, a man who had more than a passing resemblance to Dumbledore, and a little girl, who, he

realized with a start, had been the one to capture Wormtail!

"I see you're both back," Dumbledore beamed.

"Hello," Harry said politely. "We got here about an hour ago."

"You must both be hungry," said Professor McGonagall. "Would you like to join us for supper?"

Harry looked at Sirius, who shrugged, so Harry sat down on the edge of the blanket, joining the group of people who had remained at Hogwarts for the summer break. 'This view is stunning,' Harry thought as he looked into the sunset. It was so breathtaking. He hadn't seen anything like it. Clearly, neither had Sirius in a long time. He thought his god father must have missed simple things like watching the sun go down.

"Harry, Sirius," said the headmaster, bringing the boy wizard out of his daydream, "I think you've both met Ariana, haven't you?" He gestured to his little sister.

"You were there, that night in the forest," Sirius said to her, smiling. "Hello, Ariana."

She was clearly startled. Someone unfamiliar had spoken to her. Moving closer to Aberforth, she said nothing but looked at the ground.

"Come on Ari," Aberforth reassured her. "Why are you going all shy Darlin'?"

She shrugged and opened his arms with her hands, lifting them so she could sit in between them and shutting them back round herself as if they could protect her from anything in the world.

Harry would soon learn that his first impression of the girl was correct - she was mentally unbalanced.

"Hello," Ariana muttered to them both.

Her brothers thought it odd that she got so quiet suddenly. When she had met Poppy and Minerva she had been confident, for her at least. Hagrid had been a bit different (he was rather large), but she had gotten used to him during the past week. Maybe that was all she needed to do here again - get to know them.

Sirius smiled at her gently, obviously not sure what to say to a girl he thought was a seeker short of a Quidditch team, and turned to strike up a conversation with Hagrid.

"It's good to see you," Sirius said cheerfully. Hagrid had been a friend of the Marauders when they'd been in school. He favoured the Gryffindors and due to their wit and charm, the four friends had been close to Hagrid.

As the night fell, Harry examined the girl. He didn't know why, but he felt as if there was something more to her. Something deeper. As if the person he was seeing, (Ariana, did the headmaster call her?), was not the real Ariana.

She looked young, and at a guess he would say she was just about to go into her first year. In her hand, she had a thread-bare old toy, and the man whom she had run to when she'd seen him and Sirius was smiling at her with great love and affection. 'Most likely her grandfather,' Harry thought to himself.

"So," Hagrid said, "Yeh plannin' ter go ter the Quidditch World Cup this summer?"

Harry perked up. Quidditch?

"I expect so," said Sirius. "You'd like to go, would you Harry?" he asked, turning around to see Harry's eager face.

"That'd be great!" Harry said, grinning.

Sirius smiled. His godson seemed to have inherited his father's love of the sport.

Ariana once again fell asleep in Aberforth's arms later that night. She found such security in him, in a world she did not understand. Aberforth didn't know how much clearer he made things for his little sister, but sometimes, Albus saw it. Aberforth was the probably the person that kept at least half of her in focus and sane.

Soon, maybe he could help her bring the other half of herself back to her original state, so that she might be healed.

After Sirius and Harry returned to their dorm room, Poppy went to the Headmaster.

She and Snape, at the headmaster's requests, had looked in to remedies that might help Ariana regain her right mind.

Enchantments could nothing for her. Potions on the other hand...

"Headmaster," said the prim nurse as she entered the room, "we think we've created the potion that Ariana - that Ariana needs,"

Albus saw on the ingredients list many components that were also used in common Calming Draughts and Memory potions.

"It should allow her to control and to remember," she explained.

"What," he asked slowly, "do you suppose the side effects will be?" He didn't wish her to go through any unnecessary pain. She'd suffered enough.

"We're not completely sure," the nurse said quietly.

"We won't know until she takes it, will we?" he sighed.

She shook her head. Albus put his head in his hands, a rare display of frustration playing out on his face. He wanted his sister back, more than anything - he remembered how sweet, loving and gentle she'd been before the attack...

"Headmaster, the potion isn't fully completed yet," Madame Pomfrey said hesitantly. "Severus and I agree that the potion can be improved. I just thought you would like to know of our progress."

"And I thank you, Poppy. You don't know how appreciated the work you both are doing is."

An: thank you to 30Kyu for betaing!

Review please!!!!

Chapter 7

"Come on darling, come out. For me."

"No! I don't want to! Aba go away!"

Aberforth sighed. His sister had locked herself in the bathroom, and she was not coming out for some reason. He didn't know what had set her off. She had said to him that she didn't want to go outside and get any air earlier, but he didn't think she'd hide.

"Sweetheart," he said softly. "I can't leave you in there. Now please, open the door."

For a while it fell silent, then the door creaked open and her scared little eyes appeared.

"What ever is the matter with you, sweetheart?" he asked her. He loved her but he would never work her out. He hadn't been able to do that for a long time, he thought bitterly.

"I miss mama and papa," she explained to him. "I know they can't come here, but I don't know why."

"You'll know someday. I promise," he said.

The more Aberforth thought on what his brother had said about a potion that was supposed to help Ariana regain her old self, the happier he felt about it. The way she was now... it couldn't go on. He wasn't as young as he was before, and his greatest fear now was what would happen if she got in a rage.

If he died at her hand, as had their mother, who was she going to have to look after her? When she was truly scared, not even Albus could get near her. At the end of the day, he was all she had. The only one she trusted.

"Come on, why don't we go do some drawing or something, yes?"

"Aberforth, can we go and feed the goats?" she asked quietly. "I know I haven't been a good girl today, but I promise to be good for the rest of the day if we can."

He remembered that her favourite treat had been feeding the goats when back then. A smile appeared on his face, and she knew that she had won him around. Slowly, he nodded and squeezed her hand.

"We're going to have to tell Albus, but I think we can do that, Ariana."

-

"What do you think's wrong with her?" asked Harry.

"Who knows? There are so many things in this world that might drive a witch or wizard mad," Sirius said.

"Like what?" Harry asked. Sirius shrugged.

"Well, I don't know all that much about it either, to be honest," he said, blowing a strand of hair out of his face. "But once I read a case in which a witch's magical growth was stunted. I'm not too sure how that happened," he admitted, "but I don't think I want to find out, either. The poor girl never got to live a normal life - her magic kept blowing up in her face."

"That's horrible," Harry said in a low voice.

Sirius agreed silently. Ariana might have turned out a lovely girl, even though she was out of her mind.

Finally, Harry asked, "What do you think Dumbledore has to do with her?"

"I thought he was her granddad," Sirius said.

"Did he ever have children?" Harry asked.

"I'm not sure. I don't think he does. They'd probably publicise it," Sirius said. "And I've never heard of Dumbledore having children."

Then again, he's so old his grandchildren probably have grandchildren."

Harry snickered. But suddenly Sirius sat up with a yelp.

"Harry, I completely forgot! I meant to tell you, but - I've got the tickets!"

Harry looked nonplussed. "For what?"

"The potions festival," Sirius said seriously. "No, no, the Quidditch World Cup! Did you forget?"

"What, we're actually going to go?" Harry asked, beaming at Sirius.

"Of course we are!" Sirius shouted. "It's going to be great!"

Harry hugged Sirius tightly, as a son might hug his father. Sirius smiled. The sensation of human affection that he'd been longing for all these years was wonderful. He'd been so alone, but no more! He had Harry, now. The most precious thing in his world.

-

"And this is going to be your room when you come home next summer," said Aberforth to Ariana.

The two of them had gone to the Hogs Head after they'd told Albus, and Aberforth had thought that it was a good idea to show Ariana the place she would hopefully soon call home. It was going to be good. Just like old times, only better.

Her room was smaller than the one back at Godrics Hollow, but it would do for her teenage years when she wanted privacy from her brothers.

"Can we go and see the goats, now?" she asked, and he nodded indulgently.

Sometimes she had such a one-track mind. So if she put her mind to studying something she wanted, she might actually be able to learn like other students, and be normal.

The animals were kept behind the pub. Aberforth noticed that when Ariana was in the goat paddock, she was so gentle. She really did love animals. He remembered that at the picnic she relaxed after meeting Hagrid's dog, Fang.

She'd loved it. Care of Magical Creatures was going to be a great subject for her to take, Aberforth thought. She was never scared around animals.

It didn't really seem to last long enough, though, and before they knew it, a tired Ariana and Aberforth walked up to Hogwarts. They ate in the Great Hall that night instead of outside.

Ariana looked around in amazement. The Great Hall was remarkable. There was so much for her to see, with the ceiling and the ghosts. She had got used to them, oddly and easily enough, since she had been at the castle, and they didn't startle her as much as they did when she first arrived.

"So when are you two leaving for the Cup?" Dumbledore was saying.

"Not 'til the end of next week," Sirius said.

"So you'll still be here for Ariana's birthday!" Albus beamed.

"An' Harry's," Hagrid chipped in.

Harry nodded. With everything that'd been going on, he'd barely given his birthday a second thought. His birthday was going to be on the Sunday of that very week.

"Maybe we should have a double party!" Sirius suggested. "What day is your birthday, Arianna?"

"Fourth of august," she said shyly, smiling.

"Then we can have a party on the second of august," Sirius said, nodding as if that made it final. "If that's alright with you, Headmaster," he added.

Dumbledore smiled. "I think it's a splendid idea," he said. "And please, Sirius, call me Albus."

An: Last update for two weeks guys, as I am on holiday tomorrow. See you soon.

Please review!

Chapter 8

The party was arranged for second of August.

Obviously most of the guests that were going to be in attendance were their for Harry as the only people Ari knew were those she had met since she had been at Hogwarts.

The guests included Remus Lupin, The Weasley's and the Granger's (who were thrilled to see there daughters school at last), McGonagall and Madame Pomfrey as well as Hagrid who joined the party.

The first thing that struck Hermione and Ginny when the first saw Ariana was how very odd and old fashioned she looked. In her dresses and ankle length white shocks she looked nothing like the girls they were used too.

Ever since she had arrived her brothers had been asking Ariana if she had wanted to try and wear some thing that was a bit more appropriate to the times she was now living in, but she insisted on wearing the long dressed like their mother had dressed her in when she had been small.

Too much change was going to have a bad effect any way, and for now she was doing rather well so they dropped the subject. Besides, they weren't sure they were ready to see her in jeans and T shirts. They had only just got the girl they had grown up with back. They didn't want her to change. Not really. Neither wanted to change so much as a hair on her head.

To say Ariana shied away from all the new people was an understatement. In general, she stayed closet to her brothers though did branch out to Hagrid, Harry and Sirius when they were on there own. She was beginning to get some confidence about them now, which could only be a good thing.

For the first half an hour though, Sirius stayed firmly by the side of his god son. The two were close now. Both of them wanted it to stay that way.

After Harry had broken off with his friends, Sirius found Ariana when she was on her own. She was happy though, clearly trapped in a day dream. She often went in to them he found.

It was so difficult to believe she and Harry were the same age. They were so different in so many ways. Where he was independent and street wised she was so naïve and childish. After every thing she had been through, what ever it had been she still had not lost her innocent.

It was not long till he had gone over to her and offered to play with her. She liked simple gentle games so he got a Quaffle and they just begun throwing and catching it to one another. It was simple. But some times the simple things were the best.

He was surprised at how much fun he had, and the way she smiled at him, was all he needed to know she was enjoying the party.

A little bit away from them with the main bulk of the guests Aberforth observed the scene of his little sister seeming to form a new bond. She had not done that in a hell of a long time, it had been years, even in her time. It was almost shocking for him to think she had new friends in Sirius and Harry. If their mother could see her now he didn't know whether he dreaded what she would say or not.

"I can not believe she is fifteen." He said to Albus when he found his brother was at his side.

"Well if she was the age she should be, she would be well over a hundred by now," Albus reminded him.

Aberforth sighed. "I know, but she is still so innocence. Her behaviour is that of a five year old at times. I can't help but thinking Al...if she had not been in the garden that day...or if I or you had been there with her. This could have all been avoided."

"We were not to blame. You said all this at the time and mother told you not to."

“But I do. Al I do. I can’t get over the guilt. I have let her down so many times.”

“I think it is I who has let her down time and time again, not you.
“ Albus remembered. At least Aberforth had been there for her.

Neither brother ever allowed them to be sucked in to self pity so in that rare moment of sorrow, they seemed to find comfort in each other, because both knew exactly what the other was feeling.

“I won, I won, I won!” as little voice broke there thoughts.

“What did you win Sis?” Said Aberforth as he caught her in his arms.

“Me and Siri were playing a game where you are not allowed to drop the ball more than ten times, and he got to ten while I was only on eight.” She rejoiced.

Both brothers looked at Sirius knowing exactly what had gone on with him allowing her to win but both were grateful. That day, she hadn’t really stopped smiling.

“Did you? Well, that’s great Ari!” Aberforth played along.

“Yeah well I’ll bet her next time!” Sirius said to them siblings as he wondered over to them.

“Yeah, right, of course he will Ariana!” Aberforth teased him, making her laugh.

It was then that their conversation was broken up by Mrs Weasley. She had the cake ready to cut and so needed the birthday girl and boy with her.

While Ariana kept calm, she neither liked or enjoyed having every one look at her and Harry in the middle as they all sang happy birth day to them. Together they blew out the candles.

Over all it was a brilliant day.

Ariana received a dress from Albus, new toys from Aberforth, rock cakes from Hagrid and a jumper that Mrs Weasley had knitted.

"Thank you very much." She said to the red haired women.

Molly beamed. The little girl was adorable.

"It is quite alright my dear."

-

"Aberforth." The end of the day had come and after settling his sister in for the night as usual Aberforth had gone to say good night to Albus when his elder brother had called him.

"Yes?"

"I just got a call from Severus. The potion Ariana needs is ready." He said to him.

Aberforth had to say he was surprised. He knew the Hogwarts potions master was a true master in his field but already?

"And you are sure this is the right thing for her?" he checked.

Albus sighed. He was. In his heart of hearts he knew it. They could not go back to the way that things had been. Their sister had had no life at all.

"Yes I am sure."

"Then lets do it." he nodded. "We'll give her the potion."

"Tomorrow?" he asked.

"Yes. Tomorrow."

An: I need a new beta, any offers?

Chapter 9

Ariana was awake at eight the next morning.

Her eyes opened and she still had a warm happy feeling in her belly from the party before. It had been a lot of fun; she didn't remember enjoying herself so much in years. She had been outside, and when every one hadn't been crowding about her or watching her it had been a joy.

Sitting up in her bed she beamed as she saw her new dress that her brother had given for her birthday yesterday. She was going to put that on for the day.

The day before was the greatest day she remembered. She never had felt so happy as she was lately. She didn't understand why she was there really or how she had come to be so. But she was and she was glad. She was so happy to be out of that stuffy little room.

She missed her parents but she loved her new friends. Sirius and Hagrid were wonderful.

Besides, having Albus and Aberforth was just as good as having parents.

She jumped up and got changed quickly, eager for the day to get going.

Running out of her little room she was left straight in to Albus's quarters.

As usual both her brothers were waiting for her to come to begin the day. They both had a nervous look about them.

She didn't notice and they had not expected her too. It wasn't in her nature. It hadn't been for a long time.

Going over to Aberforth, she settled her self in to his lap as he drunk his tea. Albus surveyed her from behind his half moon specials. This was it, he thought to himself. The day he really got her back. The day

the bulk of her pain ended. Their were going to be awkward questions but between the two of them he was sure he and his brother could handle it.

She had no idea what was going to happen. To her it was just another day.

It wasn't long till the three of them were having breakfast. She drunk her orange juice and had her porridge quickly, having the whole bowl with out protests.

"Good girl Ariana." Albus praised as she finished, setting her spoon down by the empty bowl.

She beamed back at him. "What are we going to do today?" she asked.

"Well to start with me and you are going to go and have some fresh air, have a walk." Aberforth said to her. This was the last chance she was going to get before she had her potion.

"Ok," she nodded smiling trustingly at him.

As they walked hand in hand he tried to keep the doubts he was having over what was going to go on away. He knew it was going to be ok. No harm was going to come to her; Albus wouldn't let it happen otherwise. And besides, any thing was better for her than the prison that was her own fear. That was her own mind.

Maybe to day the spell was going to be broken, maybe she would recover. She'd be a happy, sane person again.

"Ari?" he said to her.

"Yeah Aba?" she asked him.

"You know what ever happens I love you and I never want to hurt you." he asked her and she looked blankly up at him. He knew she understood what he was saying in her heart thought. "Don't worry sweet heart." he said to her, fobbing off his comments.

“Aba?”

“Yes?” he said noticing a playful glint in her eye.

“Do you think we can have a race?” she asked.

“Like what do you mean a running race?” he questioned. “Sweet heart I think that your big brother might be a bit too old for that now.”

“I don’t. Mama said you were only a bit older than me,” she told him. “Where is mama?” she asked the dreaded question.

“Come on, darling, why don’t we go up to the castle?”

-

It was not long and Ariana found herself in a part of the castle that she had been only once before.

The hospital wing.

The boys had brought her here for a reason she did not know. She remembered when she had been where when she had woken up from the forest where she had been, that night she had met Sirius.

“Why are we here?” she asked her two elder brothers

“Darling, we need to talk to you, “ said Albus. “Ariana do you remember when you were young. What happened to you?”

“No, what?” she asked him. The innocent in her eyes was unbearable.

“Well that isn’t going to matter in a while.” he said to her. “We are going to help you - get better sweet heart.”

“But I don’t need to get better.” she said to him. “There is nothing wrong with me.”

"No maybe not." said Aberforth. "but you know Harry?" Aberforth asked and she nodded. "Don't you see how different you both are?" he asked.

Ariana shook her head. She had not. "I think Harry might be a bit clever than me but I think that's just 'cause - I don't know."

"Sweet heart we just want to help you so can you do some thing for me? Can you drink this for me?" he asked showing her a glass of some thing that looked like water. "and it tastes like straw berry, your favorite!" he told her.

She looked at him with a clear uncertainty in her eyes. She wasn't sure at all. Looking at him though she seemed to find her courage. Taking his hand in hers and the glass in the other, she nodded.

"Ok, yes..." she said.

A moment after she had drained the glass she felt her legs go wobbly and collapsed in to Aberforth's arms. He carried her gently to a bed and lay her down, stroking the thin strands of her hair.

"This is it then, make or break." said the younger of the two brothers. "Albus if we have got it wrong then I am never going to forgive myself or you." he said to him.

"I know your not. Neither am I."

Severus who had been waiting for the girl to take her draught came in to the room. He had been waiting out side and from what her brother had said he had been expecting it to be much harder and longer process than it had been.

"Is she ready?" he asked .

"Yes." Albus said stepping aside. But Aberforth did not. He had never liked nor trusted the potions master. He didn't know why he had agreed to all this. She was his baby sister. He should have said no. Looking down on her he sighed. She looked so small.

“What if we’re got it wrong.”

“Aberforth we haven’t.” said Albus to him, positively. They had done the right thing by her. This was the right thing.

“Albus I need you to aid me. You said you wanted some memories removed from her mind.” Severus recalled.

“Yes she does...” he muttered to him.

“This is the right thing for us to do is this?” Aberforth repeated again. He must should like Ari asking for her parents.

“Yes it is. So let Severus do what he has to ... Do this for her, let her recover ...let her let go of the memory of mums death...you know it would destroy her.”

“Yes...I do...”

After that day Severus felt haunted by the memory that little girl had had. He had been through a lot. But so had she. In that day he had had to endure a little six year old hysteric cries because she was not strong enough to throw off the bullies who were torturing her. He had had to endure the cries of a father as he realized he had failed to keep his little girl safe. He had had to watch a mother cry over the scared stiff body of her little girl. He had had to watch two concern little boys learn of their little sisters fate, to be mad for ever. Then he had watched a flash slide of the next few years. Then he watched as a child was so scared as her mother tried to touch her that she exploded and killed her.

It chilled him and he knew never would he forget the memories Ariana had had.

He and Albus let Aberforth back in the room when they had extracted the memories. He rushed back to her side, took her hand and sat by her side immediately, terrified for her.

He had no intention to leave her.

“So what now?” he asked when he had found his voice.

“We wait till morning. To see how she is...and hope for the best. It is all we can do.”

Aberforth looked up at Albus and watched as a tear roiled on to his beard. Never had the greatest wizard of the age been so scared.

Chapter 10

"My head."

Aberforth rose to the sound of her voice. Nothing had stopped his watch of her all night. He had not slept a wink.

"Its ok my darling. I'm here, I'm going no where." he said laying a hand on her forehead. She was cool.

"What happened to me..." she said as her eyes creped open... "Aba? Is it you?" she asked him groggy.

"Of course it's me...who else was it?" he asked her tenderly.

"But Aba, you look so old..." she said to him shocked by his appearance, as she became alert. "Aba what happened, where are mama and papa, and Albus? What's going on?" she said fully awake within seconds.

He looked at her. She was asking all the old questions but there was some thing new about her. There was som thing new in her eyes. Or more as if something had left it. The madness. It was gone from her at last.

"Sweetheart, lay back," he said to her looking her dead in the eye. "You have to relax, have some breakfast and then me and Albus are going to answer all the questions you have for us." he said.

But if he had thought it was difficult for her to eat before then he had got it wrong very wrong indeed. She just plain refused to eat that morning. She was scared and he knew it. She had no understanding of what was going on.

"Ok, then lets have it out shall we." asked Albus as he arrived and sat by her bed side.

"What the hell is going on. Why do the two of you look so old?" she asked them with wide eyes. That was obviously the biggest shock for her so far.

He smiled. She had noticed, this was a good sign.

"You've time traveled sweet heart. You have come over a hundred years in to the future." Albus tried to explain gently.

"What - how?" she asked distressed.

"We did some thing very stupid when you were young. And it was our fault." Aberforth said to her. "We are so sorry." he said taking her hand.

"I still do not understand!" she said to them panicked.

"You will with in time." Albus promised her.

She sat there for a moment as if she was taking everything in, he could see the cogs of her mind working.

"If I am so far in to the future then that means mama and papa are dead doesn't it?" she asked them.

"Yes sweetheart." Aberforth told her quietly.

He sighed, partially in relief that she understood at last. And partly in despair because she understood at last.

"When, how long ago?" she asked.

"It's been years darling. They were dead before you came here." said Aberforth.

"So how come I don't remember?" she asked them desperately. Frustration was rushing over her they could see it. They had to keep her calm so she did not do accidentally magic.

"Because something happened to you when you were young...you were ill." he said to her.

Albus looked at her. Suddenly she looked a lot more grownup. She had lost the look of her childhood self. She had changed just since the day before. The potion had taken effect. But her mind was still that of a little girl. She had no real truth.

“So what’s going on? Where am I?” she asked.

“At Hogwarts.”

“Hogwarts?” she questioned. She had gone so pale. “I can’t believe I have to ask this - how old am I?” she asked.

“The party, two days ago...don’t you remember?”

“Yeah...I think so...” she said as she tried to recall her situation. “Harry...my new friend?” she asked.

“Yes Harry and Sirius they have only been staying here about as long as you have. Hagrid was there too, though he has been here longer.” he said to her.

She nodded as the memories came back to her. She felt so confused. Nothing seemed to make sense.

“Then I’m fifteen...How did this happen to me?” she whispered.

“I don’t know darling.” said Aberforth to her. He got up from where he had been sitting and took her in his arms. He almost felt he didn’t know anything either. He knew for that moment nothing but his precious sister’s pain. “I love you sweetheart. It’s going to be ok. I’ll look after you.”

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Ariana sat by the lake. It was three in the afternoon and she had finally convinced the boys to give her some space. She was so tired and confused and she needed space.

Every thing was swirling in her head but somehow it felt clearer than it had in years.

But at the same time she felt so - nothing made much sense, but at the same time....she didn't know. She couldn't describe the way she was feeling. And every time she thought she knew, she felt the exact opposite.

It was then she heard footsteps behind her. Instantly she was on the alert.

Turning, she saw a man and a boy walking down towards the lake. They were laughing and joking about, clearly happy to be together..

They had been heading the other way till they saw her and then they walked over.

"Harry? Sirius?" she asked them unsure. She was pretty sure that it was them, if her memory served her (which it rarely did). It was funny how she could remember some stuff and not others.

"Hello Ariana." said Sirius to her.

She nodded. "How are you feeling?" asked Harry.

"I don't know..." she said to them.

Sirius nodded. He had been told by the headmaster the girl had gone to the hospital wing for a while.

"Do you want us to take you back up to the castle, to your brothers?" she asked.

"No thank you. I'm ok." she said to them, crossing her arms.

"Well I am glad to hear it." said Sirius to her.

"Yeah..." she sighed.

An awkward silence took hold. She shrugged her shoulders. "I think I am going to go for a walk!" she said trying to excuse herself. She'd

have to go back to Albus and Aberforth, she thought to herself. She had no idea how to get any where else.

She really just wanted to be on her own.

"Ariana, you'll going to be ok you know." said Harry to her trying to follow his go fathers lead.

"Thank you." she said unable to think of any thing else to say and then she walked off.

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"How do you feel now?" asked Aberforth.

He had been sitting nervously in his brothers quarters waiting for her to return from her walk. She had a lot to take in.

She looked pale and small as she came in, as well as on the point of exhaustion.

"Better," she said going over to where he was sitting and taking her place by his side.

"Come here," he said wrapping his arms about her.

"Aberforth I don't know what to do." she muttered in to his ear.

"I know you don't. And the world isn't a very fair place to you right now is it my darling? But it is going to get better. Me and Albus will take care of you."

"When?" she asked. "When is it going to get better, easier?"

"Soon sis. Soon I promise." he said as Albus came in to the room.

"Ariana." he said to her in greeting as her came and sat on her other side.

There the three siblings were together united. They sat in the richly furnished room, holding each other.

“What would mama and papa say if they could see us now? In this place? Never had much when we were kids did we?” she said looking about.

“No.” said Albus shaking his head sadly.

“Can I confess some thing to you?” she asked suddenly looking up at him.

“Any thing.”

“Al, I am so scared.” she said quickly as if she was ashamed.

“You don’t have to be. You know why? Because we’re your brothers. We’re here to protect you. And we are going to do so faultlessly from now on.”

Chapter 11

“Darling we have to talk about what happens now...” said Albus to his sister.

Four days had passed since she had woken up for the first time and thought clearly. It was time for her to get on the road to having a normal childhood. Or what was left of it.

“What?” she asked fearfully.

“Nothing bad.” he promised her. “Its just me and Aberforth though you might like to start going to school.” he said to her.

She had never thought of that. She almost remembered from her childhood when her brothers would go off and she was left behind. She’d cry...and cry and cry and now she had a chance to go. She hated it when they left her at home and they got to go. Was it really her turn now?

“I think it is going to be the best thing for you.” said Aberforth.

“But I don’t want to be split up from you two.” she said to them. They were all she knew. She did not want to lose them.

“You are not going to be.” said Albus. “I am headmaster here so I am going to be here for you all the time and Aberforth is going to be just in the village so can come and see you all the time.”

“Every day if needs be.” he grinned. He felt he would go and sit with her in class if that was what was necessary.

She sat there nodding. Well if she wasn’t going to be split up from them. And she did need, something she guessed. A routine something new. An education. She could learn to control herself.

“You’d go in to Harry’s year so you would know some one.” said Albus to her.

"But Albus if I go in to his years isn't every one going to be smarter than I am?" she asked.

"Well yes to begin with maybe but your bright I am sure if you put your mind to it you are going to be able to catch up."

"But Albus I can not even read!" she reminded him. Since she had been brought back to the world of logical thinking she had been doing a lot of it, it seemed. Maybe too much mused her brothers.

"We can get passed it." said Aberforth. He was hardly the most literate person. There was going to be a way he was sure.

"Can we? Can I?" she asked them. This was a question of living and both of the brothers knew it. They had to give her the courage that she felt was so far away.

"You my love are a Dumbledore." he said to her, reminding her of there heritage. There father had started off with nothing and yes he had hardly risen high but he had always put food on the table. There mother had had the aim to keep her children safe and protected and she had always done it when they had gone in to hiding. Albus had wanted to learn and to be a professor. And he had done it.

As for himself Aberforth wondered if he had ever really had much ambition. Maybe not. All he had been able to think about was she and when he was going to see her again. And yet here she was before him. So yes he had achieved his goal too.

"You can do this. I promise you. I believe in you." he promised.

She nodded. "It is just going to take a lot of hard work. We have four week to get going before school starts." Albus told her.

"So come on, are you going to rise to the challenge?" Aberforth questioned.

"Yes."

"Good girl Ariana. I know you can do this."

"I hope so."

Reading was the main thing on her mind. It was a short term goal but it was going to help her thought the year. Open door for her.

That weekend they found they had the castle by themselves, just the Ariana and Albus , with Sirius and Harry at the Quidditch world cup.

"What is Quidditch?" asked Ariana as they ate breakfast on Saturday morning.

"It is a sport." Albus replied.

"A good one?"

"The favorite of the wizarding world. Your going to find out about it next year." he said to her.

"Why not this year?" she asked.

"I can not tell you that yet. You're going to find out with the rest of the students."

"What is the point of having a headmaster for a big brother if he will not tell you secrets of the school?" she asked him.

Albus laughed at her cheeky grin. She was far happier now she had sound her mind, even if she was sill a little unsure about it all.

He was so glad she was back in his life. He had time and patience for her now. It wasn't going to be like it was when they had been young. He had made mistakes, but he wouldn't again.

"Come then shall we start your reading?" he asked settling in to his comfortable arm chair. The lessons were always conducted in his living quarters where they were sure of privacy. It wasn't so formal as the office. And along with the Hogshead and her dorm it was going to be her home now.

Ignoring the chair by his side, she positioned herself in to his lap, snuggled down, found the page where they had left off the day before.

“Off you go then.” he said wrapping his arms loosely about her.

He still got the impression that they were never going to be close at times. But when she chose to sit on his lap rather than sit on the chair, his fears were brushed aside. He never wanted to usurp Aberforth in her affections but knowing they were closer than they had been was a good feeling.

The reading lessons themselves were a struggle. Ariana was prone to frustration when she could not read a word and that was not a good thing. She had no control over her magic still.

Often they were still short lessons and for a break the two would go for a walk about the lake. She worked hard, always went back to the word later that day if he did not tell her. It was just going to take some time to get her up to scratch. That was all.

When she was not in her lessons often she was at the Hogshead. Her brother's pub was not so much the attraction but the animals were, and of course him.

She loved to get in the pen with the goats and could if she spent all afternoon there. When she went to school Aberforth knew she was going to miss her long lazy summer afternoons. He loved having her close. All in all he knew it was selfish, but he didn't want her to go to school. He wanted to safeguard her innocence and keep her with her.

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Sirius and Harry arrived back on Monday and went straight to Dumbledore to give their accounts to him of what had gone into at the Quidditch world cup.

He had been in his office with his sister when they had burst in.

“You ok Ari?” asked Sirius as he saw her.

“Yes.” she said to him. “are you?”

“Fine. Sir have you got a minute?” he asked her brother.

“Of course. Ariana why don’t you try in your mind to start reading this to yourself. I’ll join you in about half an hour.” he said pointing too the room that lead on to his living room. He had to talk to Harry and find out just what had gone on.

“Ok,” she said as she went through and sat down on his chair.

But she didn’t read. She was listening in to what they were assaying. Things she knew nothing about. Death eaters....camps...a dark mark...Voldemort.

Aberforth and Ariana were at Diagon Alley

Chapter 12

On Tuesday, Aberforth and Ariana went to Diagon Alley. They had to get her new things for school, and with Albus busy getting ready for the new term it was just the two of them. Sirius and Harry had been invited to join them, but when they were at the Quidditch world cup had arranged to meet Hermione and Ron later that week.

So as they got in to London Aberforth decided was going to take her to get her robes and her books and when at last they had got the borings bits done, he planned to take her to the ice cream parlor before going down to the pet shop then he was going to get her a cat he decided.

When she was up at the castle she was going to need a good friend by her side.

She seemed dazzled by it all and he was rather worried she was going to get scared by all the noise. It contrasted greatly to the peace and quiet of Hogwarts castle. Even before the attack she had never been hugely confident in crowds even though she had been the life and soul of home.

She gripped his hand, making sure never to lose him in the crowds. It was nice to have a day alone.

"Darling, are you ok?" he asked her.

"I think so." She said to him as they strolled along. "Every thing is beginning to make a bit more sense for me. Aberforth I dread starting school though. It is going to be so hard for me to get to grips with it all."

"You are a smart young girl, I know you are going to pick it all up quickly. Not like me, you have managed to get Albus's brain."

"I hardly think so." She shook her head. "My reading lessons aren't going so good."

“Our big brother disagrees. He thinks you are doing well.”

“But I don’t - “

“Dearest confidence comes time. You’ll find it.”

“Well I think I could do with it now!” She said to him.

She knew it was going to take time. What he was saying was making sense to her. It always did.

Looking about her she begun to take in all the sights and the sounds of the alley. Just like there childhood, it was buzzing with life and happiness. She remembered flashes of her pare nets and now begun to miss them as she saw all the other kids with there’s. Still she guessed she wasn’t the only one with out them she thought as she remembered Harry. Just like her he was an orphan. And so were her brothers. But of course they were a lot older than she was.

“We are going to have to go and get you your robes” he said to her as they wondered along.

“Well shall we go and do that first then.” she asked as they fought there way through the crowds.

“If you want to.” he nodded.

”Yes please.”

Glad she was showing such interest and enthusiasm they went down to madam Malkins. It hadn’t been so long since she had been unable to show interest in any thing. She was taking huge steps.

Going in to the shop she looked about. There was nearly no one else about as most people were still recovering from the Quidditch world cup. The witch who was there serving looked shocked when she saw she had customers.

“Hogwarts is it?” she said to them.

"Yes please." her brother said for Ariana.

"Right then lets go and get you measured up?" she asked. "I must say you're small even for a first year."

Deciding it was going to be far easier to say nothing and allow her to think she was going to be a first year Ariana went in to the changing room, as she lead her there.

Nervously she looked back at Aberforth who was of course there watching her a hawk. He gave her a reassuring smile and she nodded.

"So are you excited?."

"Yes. I mean - I think I am." she said as she was helped up on to the stool.

Things were going to be better for her when she got to school. Every thing was going to be ok when she started learning she told her self.

"Most kids are." she said to her. "I can't tell you how many I have come see through this shop over the years. Cant tell you how many I have seen grow year by year." she said as she stuck pins in the material.

"I bet you have." she muttered.

"Not many come to buy there first set with their grandfathers though."

"Aba, my granddad?" she laughed. "No...He is my big brother" she said to her proudly.

"Blimey I think most brothers are a bit younger than yours is." still stranger things happened in there world, she shrugged it off.

"Perhaps..." she said to her.

Ariana's eyes were shining with admiration for him.

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“Right now we have to go and get you your wand.”

“Is that going to be a good idea? I mean think about it. I am not so good with magic yet!”

“Yes but you are not going to get better till you start practicing...”

“But Aba, what if I don’t get better at it?”

“We are never going to know if you don’t try.”

“Ok.” she said quietly, realizing she was not going to win the argument, as they walked in to Ollivander’s. Her nervous state was obvious as she held on to her brother’s hand as if it was a life line.

The dark shop was unsettling. She looked about at all the little boxes stacked up on the shelves.

One of them was going to be hers soon.

“Hello,” called Aberforth.

The man who Ari could only assume was Ollivander came out.

“Ahh, Aberforth,” he said to him. “I have been expecting you. Your brother owed me and said you would be in with.” he said as he looked at the girl and paused. “Yes...I can see what he meant.”

The siblings looked at one another nervously. If Albus had owed ahead why had he not told them.

“He said you were going to need a wand that would - well... be able to channel large amounts of magic. Something a bit unusual. Let’s see what we can do, shall we?”

But at that moment all she wanted to do was run out of the shop. There was something about the wand master that unnerved her.

She tried to focus on her brother to keep her calm. She could hear what they were saying in the back ground, but she did not listen. But she didn't want too. She knew she should. She had to get used to the fact other new faces were going to come in to her life. And shyness was going to hinder her in her magical development.

Suddenly though, the man held out a wand to her,. The root of all her troubles.

Do it again freak...do it again...

The voices in her head continued to haunt her. She could not let the bullies who had taken so much from her already take her only proper chance of a life, she told herself. She had to get her self educated.

Taking the wand in to her hands she took a deep breath.

"Give it a wave."

She did so.

She watched with horrid as some of the boxes came jumped off there shelves. The candle light flickered as if there was some great wind blowing through the shop and from the commotion came a lot of banging and crashing.

Ariana panicked.

"I can't do this."

Dropping the wand she turned and run out in to the street.

"No, darling," said Aberforth as he dropped all the shopping they had got so far.

"I can't do it, I can't do it." she said as she shook her head. "No, no, stop it." she said to herself as teasers poured on to her cheeks. She couldn't breathe and it scared her. She wanted out.

"Its ok, it's ok," she heard a voice say behind her.

"Take me home Aba, take me home please." She said as tears cascaded on to her cheeks. She had to get out.

"Ok," he said as he lifted her in to his arms and stated the walk to the Leaky Cauldron so they could floo back. Maybe her recovery wasn't going as well as they had thought. "Calm down," he said pushing his lips to her forehead. "Hush, sweetheart."

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That night after they had put there physically and emotionally exhausted sister to bed the two Dumbledore brother sat up to discuss what had happened that day when they had been out. She had drawn attention to herself when she had run out in to the street crying. She could not do that again. Until she had her magic under control they were going to have to keep her in the castle grounds with the exception of the Hogshead.

"It was hardly her fault, she was startled, that was all." said Aberforth as he stuck up for her as always.

She had been upset, that was not her fault. Of that he was adamant.

"You have no need to defend her to me brother mine. I know. She has done nothing wrong. But if she had run off in to the crowds and you had not found her." Albus shivered. It didn't bear thinking about what could have happened to the girl. To their girl.

"I know...it could have been bad, but it wasn't. I got to her in time, didn't I?" said Aberforth as he collapsed in to an arm chair. He had been pacing most of the night.

"And any way what I really want to know is what you wrote to Ollivander about." he said to him. Why had his brother not informed him? He hated it when he did things behind his back.

"I just sent him a note this morning to give a few details of Ariana's case." Ollivander, who he had known for a long time, could be trusted with a few bits of knowledge of their secret. Not many minds.

He had not even said they were brother and sister. Only that she was a young girl who had a troubled past and was now struggling to develop her magic. That was all.

"Well all I ask is that you keep me informed Albus. After all, we are in this together, all three of us. No more secrets for us, no more lies please, I can't stand them." he sighed deeply. He had hated lying when his mother had asked him the first time around. Of course now the real issue was what they were going to do for a wand for her. He didn't relish the thought of trying to sneak her back into Diagon alley. And besides they had just established they had to keep her away from London. The furthest she could go from the castle was the pub.

"We could - what about..." he began unsure of how his brother would take the suggestion. "What about mother's wand?"

Albus looked at him. Aberforth could tell he was thinking about it, the pros and the cons. Could Ari really master the wand when she had killed its last owner.

"Well," sighed Albus. "Anything is worth a go."

"Do you think?"

"We can only try her with it and see how it goes."

Chapter 13

When Ariana got up the next day the first thing on her mind was what a show she had made of her self when she had been out with Aberforth. She was so stupid, she thought to herself. She had been unable to stop herself panicking though. She had just got so work up when all the banging had begun.

Getting herself out of bed she dressed herself quickly in a blue dress that she had brought with her brother the day before. She had to say she had thought what people had been wearing in Diagon Alley had been very weird. Just like what those girls who had been wearing at the party. She didn't think she would ever like to wear trousers. They were for men! Her father and her brothers wore trousers. Not women...that had been how she had been brought up.

Going out in to the rooms she shared with Albus she looked to see if he was up as of yet. If he was she could not see him. Going over too the door she decided to head down to the lake before breakfast. She thought she could make her way there and back again find now. And dhe needed a bit of fresh air.

Making her way through the castle she smiled. She hadn't thought she was ever going to get to Hogwarts when she had been young. She had watched her brothers walk out the door. Lord, she had missed them when they went away. She thought she must have been worse when they were gone. In fact she was sure, positive she had been. Her poor mother. What sort of life had she had after she had been attacked Ariana thought to herself. It couldn't have been a very good one. She must have given everything up to be a mother. To be her mother.

Her parents. How she missed them she thought to herself. She had never thought they were going to be going she mused walking down the stairs. They were always going to be there because they had been her mother and father. For the first time she really had to face up to life without them; it wasn't something she relished. Rather something she hated.

As the latter half of August drew in about the castle Ariana walked out in to the golden sun light, unaware she was being watched by her eldest brother who stood within the castle.

Albus shook his head. He still wasn't sure if he was up to the job of raising her from then on. Run a school, fine. Advise the minister for magic, why of course, for what reason wouldn't he? Guide his little sister out of the darkness which had held such power of her life. He didn't know if he could. It was too bigger responsibility. He couldn't afford to get it wrong. Not again.

Ariana when she got to the lake sat down by the side of it. The blue reminded her of the colour of the lake by the side of the house of her childhood home. Not Godrics Hollow. She wasn't sure if any of her family had ever really been able to call that place home. No, she meant the house where they had been happy. When it had been all five of them. The Dumbledores...

The peace of that time. The summer of 1888. It had been a good one. She had been four.

"I don't even really remember it..." she whispered. But it had been fun, she knew that much. But not much else. She didn't remember any specific moment. Couldn't pin point any thing...

"Remember what?" she heard a voice ask her.

She turned to see Harry. Clearly he had needed time out too.

"Home I guess. What home feels like...I mean I love the Hogshead, and being with my brothers. But it wasn't what I had when I was a child." she shook her head. "I want it back."

Harry looked at her. She was one of the most interesting people he had ever encountered and that was saying some thing considering who he had met in the time since he had left Privet Drive. He wondered if she knew who he was if she would have still confessed that too him. Most people on account of his past would never say anything like that to him, as they would consider it selfish. But she knew nothing. And that made her special.

“You must be confused.”

“Yeah...”

“Makes two of us,” he shrugged.

He knew it was selfish, but in a weird way, in the tiniest part of him, it was a comfort to know there was another person as screwed up as he was. Some one else who was as alone. And although he wished he could make her pain stop, he knew they both felt comfort just sitting there by the lake staring out wondering what that day would bring.

More fun with Sirius he supposed, beaming. His god father he had come to believe really was the best thing that has ever happened to him. But there was always what had happened at the Quidditch world cup hanging over them.

Just like the things that tormented Ariana hung over like a dark cloud refusing to move.

“My brothers want me to begin school when the term starts.” she said to him.

“Really?” he said, startled though he didn’t know why. Maybe it was her size. And her nature. She was so tiny and child like. Still he thought to himself, she would at least fit in with the first years. “What do you think about it all?”

“I don’t know,” she said to him. “Excitement I guess. And fear. Mother never let me start school; I couldn’t when I was sick. I want to know what she would say to me, if she could see me now. I just want her to guide me.”

“Well I know that feeling better than any other in the world, Ariana. That I promise you.” he said to her gently.

She looked up at him. There was a truth about him. Something that reminder her of Aberforth. As they stood there in the silence she felt like she had made a friend for the first time in her life.

"I know you do." she said and he gave her a sad smile. "You've lost your mama and papa too haven't you Harry? That's why they weren't at the party," she concluded.

"Yeah, your right." he nodded.

Any other person he thought to himself would have said how sorry they were about that. But she didn't. She just looked out over the lake, thinking to herself.

"Then we both know how it is to feel lost."

"Yeah. I guess we do..."

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"No, not after yesterday."

It was mid morning and as the three siblings stood together the boys remained in there resolve that Ariana needed a wand if she was ever going to get on in life.

She knew for all her lessons she was going to need one. But... there was some thing about magic that terrified her. It was so dangerous. She was sure she was going to make the worse witch ever. What sort of witch was afraid of their own powers? She was. And she couldn't do it.

"Ariana I understand..." begun Aberforth.

"No, you don't," she said in a way that cut him slightly. "How can either of you ever hope to understand what this feels like..."

She looked at the wand that lay on the desk. Her mother had always used it so seamlessly. She longed for Kendra even more. She was only fifteen... she felt too young to be motherless.

Sighing heavily she looked from the elder of her brothers to the younger, hoping one of them would give in. She didn't want to use magic, why didn't they understand that?

"Ariana, you're right. Most likely we are never going to understand. But you have to try and understand us as well my sister." said Albus, to her as he took her hands gently. Looking in to her eyes, he tried to see if the madness which had haunted her when she was young had returned. He was sure it hadn't. There was nothing that was holding her back but fear. "If you are ever going to be able to live normally - Ariana you can be free again, like you were when you were young. But you have to over come this."

"I'm a freak Albus," she said to him, tears filling her eyes as she recalled what she had been told on that terrible afternoon.

"No, your not. You're a witch Ariana. And to us, that is normal. Your fine." stroking her cheek. "You can do this."

"Ari, this is mother's wand." Aberforth said to her. "The wand she used when she was bringing the three of us up. She would want you to have it and use it." he told her.

Looking at the wand that lay on her brother's desk, she nodded. She did recognize it. Her mother...taking a deep breath she nodded. Taking out her hands from her brothers she moved them towards the wand. Picking it up, she felt a bolt of electricity go through her. It wasn't like it had been in the shop. It felt good. For a single flash she felt a hand on her shoulder. Turning, she saw nothing. But she knew for a moment Kendra had been with her.

"I can do this."

"That's right. Good girl Ariana." Albus praised her.

She turned to her brother and nodded.

"Your ready." Aberforth beamed.

“Yes, I do believe you are.” Albus said his eyes shining.

But in her heart, fear remained. She had a long way to go.

Chapter 14

"Here it is; sorting day." The day term begun. Ariana opened her eyes. Aberforth was in her room, and he had a cup of tea for her. She smiled.

"Yeah." she said as she came too and sat up in her bed. The day she begun school. At last!

"I brought this in for you." he said to her.

"Thanks," she said, brushing her hair out of her face.

He sat on the edge her bed. "Are your ready?"

"No, I don't think, I am." she said shaking her head as she sat up, and taking the mug in to her hands.

"Well that's a problem."

"Apparently so," she though as she listened to the birds singing outside her window. It was a nice day she thought to herself.

"You'll be ok," he reminded her.

"I know I will be." she nodded, smiling at him. There was a soft silence between the two of them for a moment as they both considered what the day meant for them. There were going to be some big changes and not only for her. He had to get used to giving her some more freedom. Not being so protective. It was going to be hard. "I can come back if it doesn't work out?" she said to him. She was still unsure.

"You can come back to me whenever you want, regardless of the day or the time." he said to her.

"I think I might have to take you up on that."

"Don't speak too soon darling, you just give it your best crack."

She nodded. "Get up, drink your tea, get dressed and come and get some breakfast. You're going to need every bit of energy you can gather today." He said as he left her room.

She nodded, and did as she was told. Dressing in her lilac dress she went down to the living room. Aberforth had done her eggs and soldiers just as there mother had done for him on his first day.

"And you have your trunk all ready?" he asked her.

"Yes."

"Good. Sirius and Harry are going to be in the grounds all day as well so we are going to go over at twelve, to spend some time getting you settled in." he told her as he sat down opposite her so he could eat his own breakfast.

By quarter past twelve, she found herself in the castle.

"What house am I going to be in Albus?" she asked her elder brother, who despite having much to do had come to meet her at the gate.

"Well that is going to depend on where the sorting hats puts you."

"The girl is an obvious Gryffindor," said Sirius.

"What is a Gryffindor?" she asked.

"It is one of the houses. There are four. Ravenclaw, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and Gryffindor." Dumbledore told her. "You will be sorted in to one tonight at the sorting ceremony." he informed her.

"What house were you in?"

"Gryffindor..." he said to her.

"Harry and I are Gryffindors too." Sirius piped up.

"What about mother and father, what house were they in?"

"Father was Gryffindor, mother was Ravenclaw," her brother told her. "And before you ask Aberforth was a Gryffindor in his day as well."

"Then I want to be a Gryffindor..." she said.

"Well if ever I have seen one in the making I think you might be it." Sirius said to her.

"We are going to be proud of you want ever house you get in too." Albus reassured her.

She smiled. Proud of her. Albus... no longer ashamed. Only proud of her, that was going to be some thing.

Considering it was the most important day of her life so far the day was going slowly. She spent the day thinking, until four a clock came, till she went to her rooms in Albus's quarters and changed in to her robes. She had persuaded her brother to allow her to wear quite a long skirt and while it did not cover her ankles it did get down past her knees. She wouldn't be comfortable any other way.

When she had brushed her hair, and she was ready she went out in to the living room where she found her two big brothers waiting for her.

Not only was it Ariana's first sorting ceremony but in over a hundred years it was also Aberforth's. He had been asked by there brother to stay for this huge event in their sisters life and had he not come he would have only worried all night. Besides he wanted to be there So he had had to put some proper robes on for the first time in years and he felt stupid, done up as he was. That didn't seem important when he saw her though.

She looked - normal. She looked like an average student. For a moment, a glorious sun light moment, nothing had ever happened to her. He was a boy again and he and Albus were getting ready to go back to school. Only that year there was going to be a difference. Ariana was going with them.

He came back to reality to find that he and Albus were old men. But there sister was still a young girl. And she had an entire life time in

front of her. From that day on, she was going to be able to do what ever she wished with that life.

“Ready?” she asked not fully realizing how emotional both her brothers felt at the sight of her as a real student for the first time in her life.

“Yes, Ari. I think you are.” said Albus to her.

She smiled. “I know I am. Are you two?” she asked plainly.

“Yes,” said Aberforth as he swallowed clearing his throat. “What’s the time?” he asked Albus.

“Five thirty. We have to get going.” he said to her. “Right, Ariana the plans for tonight. All the first years who are going to be sorted with you tonight are going to be arriving by boat any minute. Aberforth is going to take you down to met them and then he is going to join me in the great hall. You’ll come along and met us just a few minutes later. Ok?” he asked surveying her from behind his glasses.

“You mean go on my own...no, I want Aba to stay with me.” she said to him looking up desperate. She didn’t want to be away from them both. When she had just gone down to the lake it had been different. She had been completely only, just for ten minutes, but being without them going in to a room full of people was very different.

“Ari come on now, it is going to be all ok.” Aberforth said to her. “You are going to see me as soon as you get in to the hall, you’ll be ok.” he promised. “All you have to do is keep calm. And you can do that. For me you can can’t you.” he questioned her softly.

She nodded, with obvious nerves.

“Come on sweetheart,” Albus said to her. She was going to be fine he was sure of that. Walking out of there family quarters the Ariana was holding both of her brothers hands.

All Albus could think was that if their parents were there then, they would be proud of all of them. They were all going to have to climb mountains that year, not least due to the tournament.

As they came to the hall, Albus smiled at his sister gently.

"I'll see you in there," he promised her as let go of her hand. She nodded, and moved her hand so it went over the back of Aberforth, holding on to him with both. "You'll be fine."

He nodded and Ariana followed Aberforth as he continued to lead her down the corridor to the stair case where he knew the first years would be passed over to McGonagall by Hagrid. They were already arriving when they got there.

"Yer rite' Ari?" asked Hagrid beaming at her as the first years climbed the stairs.

She nodded but inside, she felt sick.

"Right you," said Aberforth as he bent down to her height. "Keep calm, and I am going to see you in five minutes...ok?"

She nodded as he brought her hands to his lips and kissed them. "Five minutes," she whispered.

"That's all." he nodded. "Right off you go then..." he said standing up and letting go.

"T'at's the way"" said Hagrid as he watched the headmasters little sister reach the bottom of the stairs. Her first big challenge had come.

She stepped on to the bottom stair...five minutes...she climbed the second...five minutes...she got on to the third...you can do this... five minutes...you little freak...

No!

She wasn't going to let this happen.

Despite the fact she shook all the way, she got up the stairs. McGonagall, not wanting to attract any more attention too the girl than was needed had begun her speech by the time she had got to them. She knew as she watched her though she was going to be one of hers. She had had to fight fear just to get there. If that wasn't bravery, she wasn't sure what was.

"I'll go and see if there're ready..." she said as she went over to the doors. Upon seeing that all the students had been settled and the staff had taking their places she turned back to the first years.

"We're ready for you now." she nodded, before turning and leading them on to begin there Hogwarts adventure.

Ariana bit her bottom lip and avoided every bodies eyes as she walked in to the hall. She looked timid and sacred. From where he was sitting by the game keeper all Aberforth wanted to do was to go and embrace her. But he had to let her do this on her own.

When they got to the front of the hall the first years stopped. Most were looking about in wonder at the great hall, and the fine goblets that lay on the tables. They were also looking at their teachers, trying to work out who taught what and who was who.

Sirius was among them for the first time. Many of the elder students as well we the young first years looked at him with fear. They had been told the year before he was a mass murderer. Even if the Prophet had said what had happened with Pettigrew there were always going to be some who just didn't believe him.

After the sorting Hat's song, the actually sorting commenced.

"When I call your name." begun McGonagall, "you will come forward, put the hat on and sit on the stall."

Firstly, Stewart Ackerley joined Ravenclaw. Mothers house, thought Ariana to herself. She wondered if she would follow him. Malcolm

Baddock joined the Slytherins. Four more students were sorted before 'Dobbs, Emma' joined Hufflepuff.

The two brothers sat up in their seats on the top table and gave each other a nervous glance. It was time.

"Joining the fourth years..." begun McGonagall. A silence fell over the hall, replacing the soft muttering. The seventh years who had been there the longest never remembered some one joining a year before. "Dumbledore, Ariana." she said to the hall.

Every one looked about with the same expression of shock on their face except for those select few who had been at the party in the summer break. Had Dumbledore got a grandchild? And if so why had she not begun school back when the rest of them had.

Ariana meanwhile walked up to the stall taking tiny steps. McGonagall gave her a soft smile, trying to give her courage as she sat on the stall in view of the entire school. On her back she could feel the eyes of her two big brothers. They were there for her she remembered. They were there.

"Another Dumbledore, at last," said the hat. "And you have been a long time coming! Well there is only one thing to do with you; GRYFFINDOR!"

From the table cheers erupted. A Dumbledore! In their house. The first in generations. That could only mean good things, surely.

Walking over to the table, Ariana grinned nervously. She hadn't been expecting such a warm welcome. Her father's house! She was in her father's house!

"Ariana, come sit with us," she heard Harry say to her through the cheers as he made room on the bench.

Working her way to his side, she beamed. "I'm a Gryffindor!" she smiled.

"Yeah...well done!" he said as they sat down side by side.

She turned up to the top table. Her brothers were both still clapping looking absolutely delighted by where she had been placed.

“That’s my girl...” Aberforth told Hagrid.

Chapter 15

It was not only was it the year that Ariana joined the school but it was also the year of the Triwizard tournament. That had been what her brother meant she thought to herself when they had been talking about there being no Quidditch. Walking up to the dorm rooms with the rest of the house she could feel many people watching her. They were curious. Now she knew she was a Gryffindor though she felt calmer than she had when she had first walked in to the hall. She felt as if she belonged somewhere. She had a place in the school.

It seemed Harry, Ron and Hermione were going to take her under their wing from the moment she had sat down next to them. Though they knew she was hardly the sort of person who would be able to handle any of the things they had done in there time in school, they couldn't just leave her to be by herself. It wasn't fair.

When they had seen her at the party they had thought she was weird. But it was obvious to the other too Harry felt some sort of duty to her for some reason. She was already his friend. They decided to go along with it any way. She was sweet enough.

To look at the four of them however the height difference was huge, and they looked like a group of waifs and strays, which Harry supposed they always had been. The poor boy, the muggle born, the boy who lived and the time traveller.

Why not?

"Come on Ariana, I'll show you our room," said Hermione as they got to the common room and the two of them wondered up the girls stair case together.

Walking in to their room, Hermione saw Lavender and Parvati were already there. They hadn't failed to hear she had joined their year in at the feast and when they had got to the dorm room they had been unable to miss the new four post bed which had been put in for Ariana.

"Hey. Your the Dumbledore girl, aren't you?" asked lavender.

Just what she didn't need thought Hermione to herself. She had been through a hell of a summer and she didn't need the questions, every one pointing at her. She needed to be left alone.

"Yes I am." she said to them but before Lavender could reply, Ari had turned to Hermione. "You don't know which bed is mine do you."

"That one," her bushy haired new friend replied, as she pointed to the one nearest the window which looked out to the lake.

"Thank you," said Ariana as she walked over.

By the end of the bed was the trunk that she and Aberforth had packed for her so carefully the night before. On her bed lay her toy goat. She had forgotten it in all the commotion of going to the sorting. Picking it up when she got to the bed she squeezed it happily. It was at least eight thirty she thought to herself, it had to be and she was tired.

Deciding to go to bed she got out her night gown.

On noticing how out of style it was Lavender and Parvati exchanged glances. This new girl was seriously weird.

"You must be excited, joining your granddad," said Parvati to her.

"No. I haven't." she said to her.

If she had time travelled over a hundred years and her mother and her father had died, then her grandpa was a long time dead.

"Hermione, can you show me where the toilets are..."

"Of course I can." she said as she led her out of the dorm room. Already Ariana had the feeling this was going to be a long term.

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"You had no right to keep that from me Albus, no right at all." said Aberforth as they got back to his office.

"I had too; there are rules about the tournament." His brother defended his actions.

"No you didn't tell me because you thought if I knew then I wouldn't agree to her going to starting school."

"And was I right?" he asked.

"As it happens you were. This is going to be stressful enough for all three of us - Albus how are you going to care for her when I am not here?"

"I am going to look after her." he said calmly.

"No." Aberforth looked in to his eyes. He wasn't going to accept that. "You got me to agree to her coming here under false pretensions. She should be at home with me." he said to her. He had sworn when they had found her she wasn't going to be neglected again. "I am not going to let history repeat its self."

"Neither am I. But she is a Hogwarts student now. We have made our decisions, we have to see them through." he said to him gently.

Albus looked in to Aberforth eyes. He saw the anger and the passion; that was where they differed. Where he was calm and cool, Aberforth let himself get passionate about the things he cared about. That had been how he had been able to tell him he was neglecting Ari the last time. He could still see a flicker of hatred in Aberforth's eye for him he was sure of it. When he had been meant to be protecting the two of them he had been dreaming of greater things only for himself. He should have focused on the family. They were what he should have prioritized.

"I never meant to let you down. Abe, I never forgave myself. And I never will. I was fool hardy."

"You still are..." Aberforth reposed. And so was he. What if they let their mother and father down again. "We both are." he said to him. "I have to get back to the pub." he sighed. He had too get out of there. He would come back and see his sister tomorrow.

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Ariana, after one night in there, could say she didn't like the dorm room. Despite the fact she was friendly with Hermione she didn't feel as if she knew her yet. And no one had tucked her in as she had been so lovingly done all summer. She had missed Aberforth as well as Albus.

"Come on Ari," said Hermione to her. "We have to get ready for breakfast and met the boys." she said to her.

Ariana nodded and got out of bed. She was starting classes today for the first time in her life.

Getting up she got her uniform on quickly, too quickly in fact because she had put her blouse on buttoned up wrong. She had to undo it all and put it on right. Taking her time, she was careful to place the right button in the right button in the right hole. Putting it down to nerves she went to the common room with Hermione.

"Typical." she muttered as they got there to Ariana. "There not up yet, I bet." she said knowing Harry and Ron well.

Ariana looked around her new common room. She hadn't had much of a chance the night before, it had been too crowded. And then she had gone to bed early. She thought now it looked quite cozy with the big arm chairs and the warm fire which was crackling away nicely in the corner. Decorated in there house colour, the red gave the room extra warmth. She was very glad she was a Gryffindor.

And then it hit her. A long time ago, over one hundred years before had, her father had stood where she was standing. He had been in the common room for the first time when he had just been sorted. And as she thought like that it was as if the spirit of Percival was

lingering there. She tried to image the teenage Percival Dumbledore lounging on one of the chairs, for they looked so old it was plausible that he had sat in one of them. Having just come in from class, he was exhausted and ready for bed. But she couldn't picture her teenage father. Remembering the one she had known was hard enough.

"Come on Ari," she heard a voice in her had been day dreaming so long she had not even heard Ron and Harry come down to met her and Hermione.

Reluctantly, she left the common room behind her and went down to the Great Hall where she had been sorted the night before. She saw Sirius up already at the table and he gave his god son a wink as they walked in. Hagrid upon seeing the kids waved at the four of them.

Along with Harry, Ron and Hermione, Ariana had her breakfast with Weasley twins and their sister Ginny who was she discovered in the year below her, while the twins were embarking on there last year there. They had three elder brothers who had already left the school and had jobs.

"You're lucky," joked Fred, "arriving the year that our Percy left."

"Why?"

"Because he is a book worm. He's a goody two shoes and a know it all." George explained.

"Sounds like some one I know." she said to them as her eyes went up to the head table where her eldest brother was now seated.

"Dumbledore?" asked Fred. He couldn't image some one less like Percy.

She had been about to reply when McGonagall came down the table with the timetables for them all.

"Hey Hermione, have you still got the timetur -"

“No I have not Ronald.” after the previous year she had decided it was going to be a much better idea to drop some subjects and focus on the important ones.

When she had her time table, Ariana studied it. Predictably it was very different to every one else's.

Monday. First lesson: reading and writing with Professor Albus Dumbledore. She had nothing second or third, but she had transfiguration with McGonagall last.

Tuesday. First lesson: Herbology with the fourth years (Gryffindor and Hufflepuff). Second she had free and then she had care of magical creatures third with the fourth years, this time with Gryffindor and Slytherin. Fourth she had free.

Wednesday. It was a full day. Again she had transfiguration with McGonagall. Then she had her second care of magical creature for the week (taken by Professor Rubeus Hagrid) before she had another period of reading and writing with her brother. She finished Potions with Snape and the first year Hufflepuff and Gryffindors.

Thursday she had three lessons. She began with Herbology again, before having a study period second. Transfiguration was third and on Thursdays she finished Herbology

Friday. She also had potions to begin with then care of magical creatures. Reading and writing was third. Flying was the last lesson of the week with Professor Sirius Black.

Harry looked at her time table. Reading and writing. It hadn't hit him till that moment that she was illiterate.

“Come on then, it's a Tuesday. We've got Herbology.”

Going down in to the green houses she braced herself. She wished it was a Monday so she had begun with Albus's lessons. It would have been easier to start with someone who was familiar.

The plant that they were dealing with that morning was ugly. They were Butuotubers. They had to collect the pus out of them. Pulling out the dragon hide gloves she had got with her brother when she had been in Diagon alley that day.

"Well done Ariana." said Sprout as she came about the green house. "Come and talk to me at the end of class won't you. We need to talk about you catching up the work you have missed." she said to her.

"Three years worth," Ron muttered to Hermione. "How is she going to do that?"

"With a lot of help I suppose."

When she got of the hour long lesson after class she released just how much she was going to have to do if she were to make her education work. It wasn't going to be easy.

Coming out of the green houses she realized Harry, Hermione and Ron had gone off to there next lesson. She didn't know her way back to the castle.

"Ariana," she heard a voice called to her, saving her from panic... as always.

"Aberforth." she said as she run up to him and through her arms about him. They had been apart all of one night. But she knew he had no idea how glad she was to see him there.

"Alright kid?" he asked her as they embraced.

"Yeah I think so."

"Come on you," he said. He had been desperate to see her.

"Where are we going?"

"Down to the lake, so you can tell me about your first night as a student."

She told him every thing, from how Lavender and Parvati had spoken to her, to the thought she had had about their papa, to the time table, how she had got on in her first lesson and how much she had missed him when she had got in to bed and had to tuck her self in. it had made her feel lonely.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, but I think stuff like that you are just going to have to get used to when you are in the dorm room." he said to her gently as they sat down.

"I know it is doesn't make it easier." she shrugged. Looking out she sighed. "No one else has to have reading and writing lesson." she said to him bitterly. She felt as if she stood out already. And she was going to stand out in potions class.

"No. I know they don't but you need to learn." he said to her reaching out to hold her hand and comfort her. "Nothing else for it." he smiled gently.

"Everyone's looking at me. I think it's because I am Albus's sister. They thought he was my granddad how weird is that. Though I think I can see there logic." she thought out loud, unburdening herself on to him. "This term is going to be harder than we thought."

"You keep at it and you are going to get there."

Chapter 16

Ariana's favorite lesson that first day was definitely Care of Magical Creatures. Hagrid she thought was a wonderful teacher. She could tell she was going to continue to enjoy her lesson in his class, were it but for one thing. The Slytherins. The general consensuses in her house were they were evil. That consensuses had spread throughout the school. She decided early on she was going to give them a wide birth. She had to keep her head down. Not that it was easy when she was Albus's sister and seem to have none of his brilliant ability. When she asked she didn't lie about who she was.

Her brothers had considered trying to create a cover story for her. Say she was indeed a long lost relative (not that that was a lie). But there was no way she could have carried it off was what they thought. She was too sweet; it wasn't in her nature to lie as it was in theirs. She would have tripped up to easily. No, she could say the truth. Albus had enough power now to fight off any one who tried to rob them of her. And at the castle he was Headmaster. He said who stayed and left. And he said, she stayed.

It was Wednesday. One of the only two days she had lessons all day long. She begun that day with Transfiguration. She wondered what year group she was going to be tutored with she hadn't been told as of yet. It hadn't been written on her time table, as it had been with all the other lessons.

"Ariana do you want me to take you up to the Transfiguration class room before I go up to Divination?" asked Harry over the breakfast table.

She nodded. She didn't know how to get up there on her own. Ron and Hermione looked at one another and shrugged. They knew the two were friends, but apart from with them and Sirius, they had never seen Harry bond so quickly with some one. It was as if he felt a need to look out for her. Which was understandable. After all she had been through (which they only understood the bare bones of), she did need some one to look out for her. "Yes please." she replied.

"No need for you to do that." Harry heard a voice behind them. It was Sirius. "One, no god son of mine is going to be skiving off class," said Sirius who knew he had to face up to his responsibility. "and two, Dumbledore has already asked me to take Ariana up to her first class, as well as to remind her she has to eat so me thing before she goes."

Ariana had looked up at the top table where albums was sitting, giving her a friendly, but stern look. He had sent Sirius to her then. Picking up the toast, she knew she didn't want it.

"I don't want to, I'm not hungry." she said she said to him as she had told her mother and brothers so many times when she had been sick.

"Come on Ari just one bit," said Sirius too her. He wasn't going to take her up to class until she had filled her belly with something. He knew Albus had been watching her the day before and she hardly ate a thing.

She looked at him annoyed but knew she had to. He had taken the same tone with her as her family might. "Good girl," he praised her as she begun to eat it. Sitting down with the rest of the Gryffindors, in between Harry and Ron, he saw a few of the other students move further away from the group, though Neville didn't and had also joined them for breakfast. He thought it was cool personally that Sirius was teaching. He had seen him about the school the day before when he had been docking points from Slytherin anyone who did that as fairly as he had made it seem was ok with him. He seemed like he was going to be a good influence for the house. If the prophet said he was innocent then he was. Simple as that for him.

"What of the rest of you starting off with today then?" he asked them.

"Divination." Ron replied.

"Somebody pulled the short straw." Sirius said as he picked up a bit of toast and begun eating it himself.

"Yeah, we know. All she does is predict Harry's death." said Ron to him.

“Nice...tell if she does it again, I’ll go up there and hex her in to next week through.” he said jokingly, but protectively. No one was taking his boy off of him. “So who is going to be entering in to the Triwizard tournament?” he asked them.

“We cant, we’re too young,” Hermione reminded him.

“So what? Come on Harry you’ll try and get your name in the goblet wont you,” he said to him. “It is the kind of thing me and your dad would have died for when we you’re your age.” If James was there then Sirius was sure he would want Harry to get his name in to the goblet. Lily was another matter. Harry had been thinking about how to reply to that when the bell went. He was saved.

“I’ll see you later on,” he said as he picked up his bag and went off to class. Sirius was left stunned. He had been sure James’s son would have been up for it.

“Come on then Miss Dumbledore. We can not have you late for your first class with old McGonagall.” he said to her cheerfully, hiding his disappointment. She nodded.

“Have you not got a class this lesson?” she asked him.

“Nope, it is one of my free lessons.” he said to her, as he checked she had finished her toast. Hardly.

“You can’t have had more than four bites.” he said to her.

“Sirius, I’m really not hungry,” she said to him looking up pleadingly. She did not want to eat any more.

He sighed. He had tried his best to try and get her to eat. Dumbledore told him he was going to have a job. Apparently Aberforth was best getting the kid to have a meal.

“Ok,” he said. He couldn’t very well force feed the girl. “We have to get you to class.”

Relieved she had been let off she got up quickly and picked up her bag. The hall was quite empty now as the last of the students filled out. "Sirius do you know what year group I am with in transfiguration." she asked.

"Your not." he said to her. The teachers when they had been told she was going to start school had been asked if any of them would mind privately mentor her. She wasn't going to progress that well in class, and she didn't fit in to any. Herbology and care of magical creatures were different as they didn't involve an actual lot of magic. They were more hands on subjects, not 'wands on' as it were. Predictably, he thought to himself, out of the three who had been asked, only one had refused. Snivillous. She was going to have to go into a first year class he said if her brothers wanted her to take potions.

On the other hand, he and McGonagall had said they were only too pleased to give up a few hours a week to give her some time one on one. He did it because of the debt he owed her, and because he wanted too. Still giving her flying lessons once a week wasn't going to make up for what she had done for him. She had giving him his life back. She had caught Peter, and she had given him Harry as far as he was concerned. They all had a second chance at life now. They had to help one another along their paths. They were intertwined as far as he was concerned.

They got to the class room on time and McGonagall was at her desk as they entered.

"One Miss Ariana for her first transfigurations lesson." said Sirius proudly as he delivered her to his old professor.

"Thank you Professor Black." she said to him nodding.

"You calling me professor...aww you're making me blush." he said to her sarcastically.

"Despite what you think, professor, you are not too old to get detention...not from me." She said warningly. "Me and Miss Ariana need to begin, please, so if you wouldn't mind..." she said and he got the message.

"Good luck," he muttered to the young student as he turned and left the room, leaving her alone for the first time with her head of house.

Once he had left the room McGonagall turned her attention to Ariana. How was it that her brother could be so brilliant and she had ended up like this, she thought to herself. Ariana when she was young had the potential to be great, the way Albus had told it to her. And she had that robbed of her. Now, she feared magic. That was possibly the saddest story McGonagall thought she had ever heard, and was distressing for any witch or wizard to hear it.

"Sit down Miss Dumbledore." she said to her, showing her to a desk and taking the seat next to her. "Get out your materials." she said, and so Ariana pulled out the Standard Book of Spells: Grade One. "You are going to be following the same course that your peers completed in their first years here - your wand too please." she said noticing she had not got it out yet. She should have known she might do that. "It will be part of your materials for my class Miss Dumbledore." She said and her student sheepishly pulled her wand out. "Now where was I - yes, you will follow the course. Depending on how fast we work you may get on to the second book of spells by the end of the year.

"Now today we are going to begin by going through some theory, and then we will get straight on to the practical. Turn to page ten please," she asked.

Ariana did as she was told. She had got to grips with her numbers before summer had ended. "Then read allowed too Me." said McGonagall. Minerva saw the girls eyes light up with alarm. Still Albus had insisted she should read for herself, or try too. She couldn't just be given the answer. "Just take your time..." she said to her gently.

Ariana nodded, but there was a desire in her to run and hide.

"Trans-fig-ger-ation is a met-t-thod..." she begun.

Well, the class did not go as well as McGonagall had hoped it would. There had been no need for her to get her wand out. The theory took up far more time than she had planned it too. Ariana tried to work most words out for her self, but it was no wonder by the end of class she was frustrated with it all. McGonagall knew she had taken on a great challenge when she had agreed to mentor Ariana, but the enormity of the task only became clear in that first lesson.

"Well done." she said at the end of it, though it was clear her pupil felt she deserved no such praise. "You worked hard today... Now do you think you can get to the hut for care of magical creatures on your own." she asked her.

Ariana nodded.

"Well, your homework is to go through what we did today." she said to her, smiling kindly. The stern old witch couldn't help but feel sympathy for Ariana. "Go on," she said and Ariana rushed out of the door.

She did not much feel like going to Care of Magical Creatures though. Despite the fact she had enjoyed it the day before she felt as if she had completely messed up her lesson with McGonagall. Still, she couldn't skip class on the second day.

She wondered down the lawn, towards Hagrid's hut. Some of the others were already there. She noticed a blond haired boy with a pale, pointed face was. Hermione had told her the day before he was called Malfoy and he was thoroughly unpleasant.

On seeing the head masters sister walking down he sneered at her and she managed to keep calm and ignored him, wondering over to the only familiar student there. Neville. Harry, Hermione and Ron weren't yet there.

"Hello," she said to him.

"Hey." he nodded to her as the two of them entered a quiet silence between them.

Sharing a soft smile the two waited for class to begin, with Ariana constantly looking up the lawn for their friends. It took another five minutes for them to arrive.

"How'd it go?" asked Harry as he got to her side. Not wanting to admit the truth through embarrassment Ari gave him a grin.

"Not too bad."

"Good," he smiled. "What year did you get put with in the end." he asked her.

"Oh I wasn't with one, I was on my own." she said to him.

"She's mentoring you privately." he asked.

"Yup. And Sirius is going to be on Fridays too I think, in flying. Then I have Albus for reading and writing."

"Reading and writing?" said a voice behind them. Just what she didn't need thought Harry to himself as he turned about to defend Ariana.

"Shove off Parkinson."

"So the sister of the great Dumbledore can't even read and write." she squealed to her fellow Slytherins who all laughed at her.

"That's right, she can't. And she is still smarter than the lot of you put together," said Harry to them.

He turned back to Ariana. She looked terrified. She knew she was a freak but she had been assured by her brothers it wasn't going to be like that here. That people wouldn't laugh at her. She had to get out of there. When he had been talking, Ari turned. And she ran. She had to get out.

-

At break Harry went up to the common room. He hadn't gone after her at the time as he had thought she had needed time out. But he was determined to find Ariana before third lessons. It wasn't hard.

Going up to the Gryffindor tower he found her there. She had been crying obviously.

"Ari you can't let people like her get to you." he said as he dropped his bag and sat on the sofa by her.

But she hadn't been able to help to.

Nodding, she knew what he was saying was right. Burying her face in her hands she didn't want him to see her tears.

"I want my mama." she whispered. Kendra was all she wanted. All she could think of was her...

"I know you do. Shall I let you in on a secret..." said Harry to her taking her hands. They had known each other a month, and yet he could tell her things he told no one else. Because she took things as they came, and didn't try and make him in to something he didn't feel able to be. He wasn't The Boy Who Lived to her. He was Harry. "So do I."

She looked at him and nodded. She knew he did.

"Ari the only way she can beat you is if she is stronger than you are." he said. "I think you're ten times stronger than she can ever be. You can do this."

"I don't feel strong."

"You don't have to feel it to be it." he told her. "Pansy Parkinson is a bully. And they are cowardly and weak. I know that. You do too."

-

Albus had been concerned when he heard what had gone on in class. After returning to his office from the staff room he found his red eyed

sister was there already. She had been crying. Minerva had told her how frustrated she had got, Hagrid had explained what had happened and he had been worried she wouldn't be able to control her magic and emotions. But through some miracle she had.

"Come here you," he said as he walked up to her and embraced her. Why had she not come to him sooner?

"Albus it was awful." she said to him.

"I know it was," he said to her gently. Rubbing her back, he held on to her tightly.

"Come. We'll have some sherbet lemons, some tea..." he said as he took her through to their quarters. Their's...had they ever been his? He begun to wonder...he loved sharing though.

Sitting down on his chair, she sat on his lap and held on to her brother tight. It was apprehensive at first, but then she relaxed in to him. She had never seemed so relaxed with him.

Five minutes later, she had fallen asleep on him. Apparently, school was wearing her out. He kissed her head and shut his own eyes. They weren't going to get any reading and writing down that lesson.

The last lesson of the day was potions. Renewed from her nap Ariana got there five minutes early, having been walked down by Harry. She had to try and take his comments on the chin if Snape said any thing to her Harry had explained. But compared to the other students, he barely paid any attention to her. She had chosen to sit on the end of the middle row, and from there she could copy down off the board easily. She just couldn't read what she had written, that was all. One day she would be able to though. And she listened carefully trying to take as much in as she could.

Snape, despite loathing the house Gryffindor, couldn't humiliate her though. He had seen hat she had gone through in her past. He had extracted those awful memories. She had been picked on like he had been. She had been through enough.

And so he said nothing to her, she said nothing to him apart from answering the register and they got along like that.

Chapter 17

"What do I plan to do Hermione? What Dumbledore can't. Make Parkinson's life hell." said Sirius as he found out what had gone on Care of Magical Creatures on Wednesday.

He had picked on people when he had been at school, sure but they had been able to take it. Ariana was a fragile, scared, sweet girl trying to make the best of what she had been given. And they had to face it wasn't a lot. He was going to help her in every way he could. No way was she going to be bullied on his watch.

Harry, who thought he was quite like his god father, nodded in agreement. Damn right, seeing Pansy get what she deserved was going to be good. Sirius was going to do the right thing by her; Ron seemed to have the same sentiments.

"I am sorry Hermione but I am not going to stand by and watch as some Slytherin gits wreck the confidence she has got." he said as he saw the 'but you're a teacher' look cross her face. No way. "The Slytherins are going to get what's coming to them." he said and he walked in to the great hall for breakfast on Friday morning.

"Where is Ariana any way?" as asked Ron, who despite being freaked out by her to begin with was getting quite used to having her about.

"She said she was going to meet us down here." said Harry who had been the only one to see her before she had left the common room.

"Translation," sighed Hermione. "I'm skipping breakfast."

-

Albus Dumbledore walked in to the library. Not many people were there yet, but he knew one who was.

"If you are not going to go to the toast, then the toast is going to come to you." he said as he walked over to the table where he saw Ariana sitting.

She scowled at him.

"I don't want it." she said to him.

"You have not had one decent meal week. Don't think I haven't been watching you from where I have been sitting at the top table."

She sighed. Pushing the book she had been trying to read asides she looked at the buttered toast her brother had brought her and sighed. "Every one is going to notice you aren't at breakfast."

"There are more important things in life, Ariana." he shrugged it off. He watched as she begun tearing off little bits of bread and eating them. "I got an owl from Aberforth last night. He is going to come and collect you for the weekend tonight."

For the first time that day her face lit up. The green eyed monster visited Albus at that moment. Why couldn't he make her that excited? Why couldn't the thought of spending time with him make her so happy?

"What time."

"Five o'clock."

"Brilliant." Ariana picked up her toast and begun eating it properly. Five could not come quick enough. There was only one challenge in her way as far as she was concerned. Care of magical creatures...

-

Ariana walked down to the hut. She was not going to run out the time. She was going to see the lesson through. The Slytherins weren't there when she arrived. But when they did she was going to front them out.

"Ari!" said Hagrid to her as he saw her.

"Sorry, professor - last lesson."

“Weren’t yer fault.” he said to her. His kindly face was lit up and his beetle black eyes were full of warmth. “Don’t worry ‘bout it lass. You jus’ see it out ter’d day.” he advised her.

“I’m going too.”

When Parkinson arrived, Ariana turned away from her and remembered what Harry had told her in the common room. She was stronger than she was. She just had to believe it.

Getting into groups of five as they had been told too, Neville and Ariana joined the trio.

They were going to be observed the behavior of baby blasted-ended-Skrewts. That was all they had to do. Wands away.

Through out the lesson they could hear the Slytherins laughing at them. Each of the Gryffindors had cause to think it was them for some reason. Ariana was clearly agitated.

Swallowing, she focused on the fact by that night it was all going to be over and she had two days of peace with her brother ahead of her. He was going to make it ok for her, he always did.

“Look at her.” Ariana heard Pansy say. Just block it out, she thought to herself. Harry who was sitting by her covered her hand with his to give her courage. She look at him and nodded. They were going to get through the class if it killed them both.

Just as Pansy got up and was about to start mocking them though, something happened. She feel straight back down.

“Ariana did you see that?” asked Harry. She shook her head and turned to the Slytherin group. Pansy was back on her feet. But not for long. She was down again.

“What’s happening to me.” she shrieked at Draco not understanding.

“Revenge Padfoot style.” Harry said to his group of friends.

By now, the whole class was watching her and they were roaring with laughter. Finally she got to her feet.

“It’s the Dumbledore girl!” she shrieked.

“But I can’t even read and write. How could I do that?” she said to Harry. The entire class had heard it in curiosity over what her response would be. They laughed even harder. She had a goof point.

They all took it for sarcasm but Harry knew it was not. She was worried this was her. That she was doing accidentally magic. And she wasn’t laughing with every one else.

“It isn’t you don’t worry.” He reassured her.

Finally Pansy’s torture stopped and it was her turn too run off to the castle. Out of the corner of his eye Harry saw a big black dog run off to the Quidditch pitch. Harry got the distinct feeling that Sirius wasn’t done with her yet. But she’d keep.

-

“That’s good. That’s very good.” he praised her. “Do you know what it says.” he asked.

“No. Read it too me Al.” said Ariana. She had just done a dot to dot.

“It says, ‘my name is Ariana. I have two brothers. One is called Aberforth and the other Albus. I am a Gryffindor student at Hogwarts school.’ That’s good.” he said to her. Her letters were clearly defined. She was going to have good hand writing.

It was all little steps. But they were little achievements. When you put little things together they came together as something big. “I’m proud of the way you have tackled this week. You know the sorting hat had never made a better decision than when it put you in to Gryffindor house.”

She blushed but continued to beam. She had had a good day. But one thing troubled her. What had happened to Pansy. She had been

humiliated. No one deserved that. She had told Albus when she had got to class and he had given her comfort and assurance that who ever did it was going to be punished.

Two wrongs did not make a right.

-

The sun light was beaming through the grounds as Ariana walked down to meet Sirius for flying. She had been rather looking forward to it, though nervous.

Sirius was in the middle of the Quidditch pitch looking about mournfully. He had just been told it wasn't going to be there all year for lessons, especially in the summer. He was going to have to teach on the lawn.

"You alright?" he asked as he saw her coming towards him.

"I think so. You?" she checked.

"As good as I get." he nodded. "Right young lady lets not waste time." he walked over to the broom he had got out for her. "Comet 360. Not the best brooms but there are far worse, and it's a good starter." he explained to her as he put down on the floor by her side. "Put your hand over it and say 'up'."

"Up." she said to it.

"Nom Ariana say it like you mean it. Forceful." he said to her.

"Up!" she said with a bit more meaning. The broom moved, but side to side, not upwards.

"Louder."

"UP." she said giggling, and then she felt some thing in her hand as if it was drawn by a magnet. She had got the broom to come up. Unfortunately as soon as it had hit her hand she had dropped it.

"Sorry." she muttered to him.

"Go once more, and be ready for it." he advised her.

"Up." fourth time lucky.

Sirius smiled. It had taken some of his first years earlier that week a lot longer for them to get to grips with it. Mostly because they were too nervous of him, he thought grinning. Honestly there had been one lad who he was sure had just been waiting for Sirius the mad mass murderer to kill him. They were going to have fun that year.

"Good girl. Now get on it." he said to her. She did as she was told.

"I want you to hover for a moment. Then lean forward and touch back down ok?"

That was the first lesson of the week that she came out of happy with what she had done. Sirius was an even better teacher than she thought Hagrid was and Sirius believed she was going to be a pretty fast learner when it came to flying. He had over heard McGonagall and Dumbledore talking about the transfigurations lesson. She had it tough and was working so hard on the theory they had got on to none of the practical stuff yet. He dreaded to think how Snape was treating her join class.

When she was told to go Ariana run up to the common room. It was four. One hour to go till she got to go home for the weekend. Quickly she packed her bag and then went to the common room to sit with Harry and the others till quarter to five came.

She said good bye to them for the weekend and after assuring Harry she was going to get to the gate fine by herself, as she had walked down there most days in the summer when she had been going between her brothers, set off.

It was only once she got in to the corridor it occurred to her she might met the Slytherins on the way. Thankfully, there were none though, and when she got to the gate, she saw her brother wondering up to get her. He was on time as always and looked delighted to see her.

“Aba.” she cried as she run down to him. He hadn’t seen her the day before and he had worried for her.

“My Ari.” he beamed as she run in to his arms.

He picked her up and spun her about the young girl who was thrilled to be back with him.

“Did you have a good week in the end?” he asked her as she settled into his arms.

She thought about the question for a while. Had it been good? Not all of it for sure. But there had been some good parts.

“It was alright.” she said to him.

“Well you can tell me about it on the way home!” he said as he turned and carried her away from school. He could feel she had put no weight on. He had hoped she would, after all she needed more energy if she was going to be working. Still it was early days.

They were both unaware of Albus watching them from the castle as they went off together in to the village. He sighed. The rest of the world had no idea how much he would have loved to abandon the castle for the weekend and go and be with his family. They had no idea either.

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By the time they had got back to the Hogshead, Ariana had given Aberforth a blow by blow account off all the important moments from the first week.

From Pansy’s bullying (that made him boil with anger), to the way she had been accepted in to her friendship group (which made him feel more relaxed) to her struggling in class (which made him glad he had got her away from the castle).

"Well we don't have to worry about any thing this weekend." he said as he got her home. "Just having a good time."

"I have to do my home work." she said to him.

"Well I can give you some help if you need me too." he said to her.

"Yeah, but not tonight." she smiled.

"No we can have some fun." he agreed. She had worked enough this week. "The goats have missed you. You going to feed them for me tonight?"

"Yeah." She said to him.

"Ok, go and put your books and clothes in your bed room then we can go down to the pen."

She did as she was told and went to her room. They had done it up for her in the summer. It was now a pleasant green. Though not big, the room was cozy and felt more like home to her than Hogwarts castle did.

Running back out she went Ariana to where she knew the goat feed was before going to the pen. Her brother watched her from the pub, and sighed with relief.

Aberforth felt better for having her back with him. He had hated it when she had been at school. There were so many things in term time at the castle that might set her off. When she was with him, she was safe.

By nine o'clock that evening Aberforth found himself having locked up and sat on the sofa with his sister having a cuddle. She had come to him as she might when their parents had told her off when she was in need of comfort. Taking her in his lap he kissed her forehead and tried to forget everything else. Nothing else matter to him. He shut out the world. She was safe.

Chapter 18

"Right come on you we have to get up the castle for nine, have you brushed your hair?" said Aberforth, calling to Ariana.

When she had been young he didn't know how many mornings he had had to do her hair, if their mother had been too busy to do so. He didn't think he'd know how to do her hair now though. It had been so long. He had forgotten how, properly like.

"Yes I am ready."

"Breakfast?"

"I have an apple," she said to him.

"Which does not constitute a meal." he said to her.

"In Ariana's world it does." she said to him.

"Well, welcome to the real one sweetheart," he said. "Come on sit down and have some porridge."

She shook her head but did as he requested. It was the only way to keep him happy and she had figured that fact out.

"There's a good lass." he said to her. "What classes have you got today?" he asked.

"Reading and writing and then transfiguration last." she said to him.

"No Herbology?" he asked remembering how they had met up after the week before.

"No." she shook her head.

"Oh."

After they had had breakfast and she had feed the goats one past time for the weekend they went up to the castle. She wasn't so

reluctant to go back to school as he had thought she would be after such a nice weekend as they had had together. But she kissed him on the cheek, gave him a cuddle and run off when they got to the gates quite happily. He supposed it made sense. She had friends her own age now and wasn't going to want to spend every waking moment with him.

She got to the dorm room at quarter to nine and through her bag on to the floor. She was ready for another week now she thought, and was quite looking forward to it.

By five to nine she had arrived at her brothers office. Knocking on the door she waited to be called in as she realized when it was in school time he could very well have some one with him.

"Come in" he called to her and smiled as she entered.

"Morning Al." she said to him. There was never the thought of her calling him professor. That would just be too weird.

"Hello Ari, did you and Aberforth have a good weekend?"

"Yeah it was brilliant." she said to him.

"Good, good." he said to her.

"Did you have a good weekend?" she asked as she sat down in the chair in front of his desk.

"Yes I did." he said to her, knowing if it had been at the Hogshead then it would have been better.

"What did you do?" she asked

"I have been getting ready for the Triwizard tournament. The last arrangements for the other two schools arrival have been made. They are going to be arriving here soon." he explained to her.

"It isn't going to be long till they get here then."

“By this time next month our friends from across the sea would have arrived.” he said to her.

“Has this ever happened before.” she asked to him curiously.

“Yes but not for a very long time.”

She was glad she was going to be at the tournament. It sounded as if it was going to be really exciting

That lesson went quite quickly, and surprisingly well. The weekends break had had a good effect on her and Albus was pleased with the progress she made. To think how far she had come in a week was incredible.

“What are you doing next lesson Albus?” she asked. She had to try to go to the library and do some Herbology.

So far Sprout had been the only professor who had insisted that she had to try and catch up. She had to try and work from Hermione’s old notes and a text book to bring herself up to speed. Maybe he could help.

“I have to go to the Ministry of Magic to meet with the Crouch.” he said to her. She did have a thirst for knowledge that mourning.

“So you’re going down to London for the day,” she said. She was just going to have to go to the library by herself and study.

“Sorry sis.” he apologized to her realizing what she was going to ask.

“Its ok.” she shrugged.

Heading over to the library five minutes later, Ariana was surprised how happy she felt after her lesson. She must have done well she thought.

“Hey ya, Ariana.” she heard a voice as she went in. It was Neville Longbottom.

“Hey have you got a free lesson now?” she asked him.

“Yeah, have you?”

“Yeah. Can I sit down with you? I have to try and get some Herbology done.”

“Oh Herbology! That is a brilliant subject. The only one I am much good at.” he admitted to her.

“I thought it was quite good last week. Some of it was almost relaxing, with the plants and stuff. I’m enjoying it.” she admitted to him. When she looked at the books though she saw the thorn in her side/ “Well, I will be when I get to grips with the theory.”

“Well do you need a bit of help.” he offered.

“Yes please.” she said.

“Ok,” he said as she got out her text book. Leaning over it together, they got to work quickly. Neville was as nervous as she was when it came to lessons normally but they found working together easy.

“You know you’re a good teacher.” Ariana said to him as he helped her get to grips with it all.

“I don’t think so,” he laughed out loud. It was a long time since any one but Sprout told him he was good at any thing.

“I think you are.”

-

Aberforth sat in the Hogshead. At night it seemed quiet now with no Ariana to talk too. He had got too used to her being there again over the summer. It had been better than the old days had been. It had been amazing. And now she was off getting herself an education. Well she could try. He wasn’t going to stop her trying, that would be just plain wrong of him. But he just didn’t think it was going to work.

He had changed his mind and he didn't want her there. The potion had helped her yes but was it enough?

He didn't know. He didn't think so.

And with that evil little cow Parkinson up there he would just be a lot more comfortable if she was at home with him where he could ensure her safety.

It was then the door to the pub opened and he saw the half giant Hagrid come in with Sirius Black.

"No early morning classes for either of us tomorrow, so we are going to get slaughtered," said Sirius to Aberforth. "Give me what ever has the most alcohol in it and one for my companion." he laughed.

Aberforth smiled and got the drinks for them. The bottles he surveyed up were dusty but you couldn't get anything so strong in the Three Broomsticks. That's why people came to him. "Pay the man Hagrid." said Sirius as they sat at the bar, Hagrid taking up two seats.

"I don't suppose either of you two saw my sister today, before you get to drunk to answer," he said to them.

"Only in the great hall. She wasn't eating a lot again," Sirius filled him in.

"She is a naughty girl for that." said Aberforth as he took the money Hagrid had been looking for in his huge pockets. "Thanks." he muttered.

"She says she isn't hungry.," said Sirius to him, but the thought of a a fifteen year old not been hungry was in itself weird. He knew girls weren't as bad as lads were, but still. She had to eat some times and yet she almost never did it seemed.

"Worries me, she is as thin as a whip that girl." He said quietly.

Maybe it was her size that added to his worry for her most of the time. The fact she looked as if she was ready to break didn't help his confidence in her.

"Well let's just hope she is going to develop an appetite one of these days," said Sirius to him.

But he thought he knew her far too well. No, if it had been going to happen then it would have come by now.

"Don't worry Aberforth. We're there to watch her, when you're not. And so is your brother." Sirius tried to comfort him. But the thought of Albus watching their sister did nothing but worry him further. He had watched her before. And look what had happened then he thought to himself.

Chapter 19

"Ariana come on," said Harry to her. It was one of the most exciting days he had ever spent at Hogwarts. The day that the other schools were arriving for the beginning of the tournament. They had had their last lessons off and now every one was heading down to the lawn to greet their foreign guests. What were they going to be like he wondered. He had never met a foreign wizard before.

Ariana had to say she was quite excited about it all as well. She had never met someone from a foreign country before let alone a wizard. It was going to be a whole new experience for her. The two of them raced down on the lawn together.

Harry Ron and Hermione, Neville and Ginny were all there when they arrived and had been looking about with impatience for their friends. .

The two of them arrived it seemed just in time.

"Look what's that up in the sky," said Colin from where he stood in front of them. He was pointing up at the sky. Ariana strained her eyes and could see a small black dot, but it was coming closer to the school all of the time.

"What if they crash in to the castle," said Ariana to Harry. They were going to crash she was sure of it and the thought of it made her feel sick. They were coming closer. And straight for them. Was she being irrational, she wondered?

Only she could think of that at a time like this, he thought to himself. "Of course they are not going to crash, stop worrying," he said to her gently.

Sometimes he wished he could get her to have a little more faith in magic, but he could see her reasons for not having any. The 'magic' of magic for her had gone out a long time ago. She looked about and when she located her brother she tried to catch his eye, it was obvious how ever he was focusing on the arrival of his guests.

All of the six hundred students in the school were out there and she couldn't help but feel under pressure. She could feel the magic swelling up inside of her for the first time since she had been at school. When she had been in class it had been different. That had been emotion. But now as this unfamiliar experience panicked her, she knew something was going to happen. She had to get into the castle and find a quiet place.

She turned away from Harry and as she walked into the castle she was sure she heard him call her name but she had to carry on. Going in to the entrance hall, she saw a door. It had never been there before but it was going to have to do. From outside she could hear screams of delight at what was going on.

The room she went in to was like a sitting room only there was no sofa. The room held no obstacles that she could harm herself on. Only pillows so she could lie down. It was exactly what she needed.

It wasn't long till the magic that she had been suppressing came out of her. She had not done a spell in weeks; it seemed to all be coming out at once, from no where.

Her entire body shook with the shock of it all. "Aba!" she cried out in fear.

There were so many colours and bangs she wanted to get out of there. She wanted to be held. For someone to come.

As her eyes filled with tears her vision was blurred, panicking her even more. She just wanted it to stop but she didn't know how to make it.

"Mama!" she cried out. She had never been on her own when this had happened before. Someone had always been there to make it stop. She wanted it to stop. She was just waiting for the crash to come when the dot in the sky crashed into the castle. "MAMA!!"

Covering her face, she tried to convince herself that if she could not see what was going on then it wasn't happening to her. She had

thought the potion was going to make this stop. But apparently not. There were still screams of delight and cheering which she could hear from out side.

The door which she had not realized just opened shut against, and then the noise went away.

“Ariana.” said Sirius. He had seen her go in from the celebrations outside and he had wondered what was wrong with her. He watched as she went mad it seemed. Her whole body was shaking and she lay on the flooring sobbing as magic seemed to come out of every part of her. It was like she was glowing on the floor. What had happened to make this happen he wondered? He had seen her go out on to the lawn with Harry she had been fine when they arrived.

“Ok, its ok,” he said from where he stood unsure if he could get near enough to her or not.

“Want mama - get mama!” she said to him.

That was all Sirius could take. He was unwilling to watch a small scared girl lay on the floor and cry for a mother he knew would never go to her.

“Honey its ok,” he said as he knelt down to her height and look into her eyes. They were glazed over.

He reached out and touched her arm. Just as it had been on the night the two of them met it was far too hot for him to touch it.

He had no choice he realized to wait until she had stop fitting. He had no choice but to wait. It seemed a life time before it stopped, but slowly the glowing stopped. She lay there for a moment out of her mind and silent before continuing to howl.

“I want Aberforth.” she said to him as she looked up at him. And he would want to be with you, thought Sirius.

“Ok I am going to go get him in a minute but first we have to get you comfortable. Ariana what happened? Why did you panicky.”

"The dot in the sky was going to hit the school." she said to him weakly.

"That was the Beauxbatons carriage. They weren't going to crash in to Hogwarts. And even if they had no harm would have come to the castle. This old place has been standing for centuries." he said, wondering if some thing as small as that was really enough to set her off. Albus had said it had been when she had been a small girl at home, but she had had the potion. It was meant to make all of this stop for her.

She was going to have to go to the hospital wing, that much was clear to him. She felt hot when he touched her forehead. She was exhausted.

Shutting her eyes at his gentle touch she seemed to relax a little and his eyes were over come with affection for her. She went through to much for her age, just as his god son did.

"Ok, shall we just sit here for a minute and let you get your breathe hey," he said to her gently, as the tears continued to poor gently down her face.

"Sirius?"

"Yes Ariana."

"Will you hold my hand. I can't get it to stop shaking." she said to him and he took it in to his. Nodding he felt his own tears well up. It had been a simple request but somehow there was some thing underneath it that told him this was a cry for help. To get away from the loneliness.

He wondered as he sat there looking at her if it was enough for her to be friends with other kids her age if it was enough for her to have doting brothers. What she had been through that night, her fit had terrified him. And he was sure she had had them when she was tougher. How on earth did you get over some thing like that? How would she?

He had to get her to the hospital wing before every one started to come into the hall.

“Ariana do you think it would be ok if I started to move you yet?” he said to her and she nodded.

Lifting her into his arms he wondered how muggles could do that was so appalling to a six year old that meant even over a decade later she wasn't functioning properly.

Later that evening her brothers sat by her side. They had thought she had been on the road to recovery. They had been wrong. Seriously wrong. Yet in himself Albus remained sure that educating her was the way forward, they had to make sure she could beginning to control what she was doing. So she never had to go through what she had that afternoon again. From the description that Sirius had given him it had been what their mother had experience on at least weekly basis. Ariana had been there nearly three months. She hadn't had a attack ever since the night she had caught Peter. She had been doing well.

Aberforth took a different view point. He had been right in his heart what had been best for her all along. And it was not school. It was home. Familiarity, quiet. They had to keep her at peace. She had been set off that afternoon by something in the sky for merlins sake. If she had not had the sense to get herself out of the situation then things could have been bad. She might have made the papers, and then she would have been sent off to St Mungos, never to be seen again.

No he wasn't going to let that happen to her.

“I think I should take her home.” he said to Albus.

“For a few days yes I think that is going to be a good idea. Let her recover for a while before she comes back to lessons.”

“What are you going on about? She can not go back to class, to the dormitory. You heard what happened to her today. It sounded as if it was a bad one, one like the one she had the day -” he paused.

"Well say it if you are going to." said Albus to him.

"The day mother was killed."

"But no one did die today did they. If it had been that bad then Sirius would not have got the chance to walk away. But I take your point though. We can not let that happen." he said to him.

One person had died due to her illness. That could not happen again.

"Then she has to go home." Aberforth continued to argue.

"She has to learn to control herself."

"Why? Let me guess: for the greater good?"

A dark shadow fell over his face. Aberforth needed to get out of there after seeing Albus look so guilty. He was sure he didn't feel it, not really. If he had been there for her that day, not Sirius.

Kissing his sister on the forehead he got up and left her bedside. He was going down to the lake.

As he passed out the room he didn't see the tear fall down his older sibling's face.

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"When I saw she was going to the school I should have followed her." said Harry to his godfather on hearing what had happened to Ariana when he had been with Ron and Hermione in the feast. In a way he felt responsible for the attack the day. The way he had brushed away her fear when she had told him of, it had been cruel. He should have taken her more seriously or at least followed her in. Sirius disagreed.

What he had seen that day had been too much for him to handle in some ways. He would not have wanted Harry to have been faced with the same thing.

It had really hit home to him that day what she had been through ever since she was a six year old girl. There had been no escape for her. And when he had shut his eyes he heard her frail voice calling out for her mother ever since. She was a baby he concluded. Nothing more. A baby in a body of a child. In a fighting world she could not get to grips with.

"No that would have been pointless. You could have done nothing for her." he said to him. He wondered absently if any body could.

In the months they had bent together, he was not sure that he had ever seen his go father more thoughtful. Not even when they had been talking about his mother and his father. He had really seen something which had affected him badly that day.

Sirius remembered Azkaban. How helpless he had felt when he had been in there. But he had stayed sane because he had known in his heart he had done nothing wrong. That had been the thought which had kept him alive. Others hadn't been so lucky; they had done the crimes they had been committed for. And they had had to face facts. Some had cried out for their relatives in the night. Wives, daughters, husbands, sons, fathers, mothers...

That had been what the girl had reminded him of that day. The Dementors. When she had an attack it was as if she was surrounded by them. They wouldn't kiss her but neither would they let her be. And she couldn't produce a Patronus.

What crime had she committed?

"Go up to the tower and go to bed Harry."

The potion which Ariana had been given when she had first got to Hogwarts was given to her again the next morning

The potion which Ariana had been given when she had first got to Hogwarts was given to her again the next morning. Once again she fell into a deep sleep once she had it. She was going to be feeling better once she had it thought Albus. But no longer was it enough. That day had made him realize that. It was enough to sustain her for a while but it had not given her back her sanity. It had only given false hope.

She looked beautiful as she lay in her hospital bed. Beautiful and strange, like a half finished painting that had gone wrong. She was one of a kind. Rarely had he heard of cases like hers. There had been others of course when he had been growing up. Some had been luckier than Ariana and had managed to grasp some sort of control of themselves. He had rarely heard of a case worse than hers though. He thought the only way it could be worse if she had been killed by the boys who had brought her so much suffering. He wondered now what had become of them. They had suffered an attack of there own hadn't they? His father had gone after them, and he had given them what he had thought they deserved. Albus inside had always been in two minds over what Percival had done. On one side of course it had been right. He had been protecting his young. The most basic animal instinct. Protecting the family he loved so desperately. But then he had been made to leave them for ever. To Albus that made the attack wrong. He had left his wife and his children just when they had needed him the most. And they had been such a tightly knitted family. They had been together, the five of them; no one else was ever needed by any off them. The great Dumbledore's. Rocks of the community.

How had it come to this? Whoa could have known back then this was going to come to pass? And just when every thing else was going on. He had the tournament to think of and then there was Harry. He hoped the boy who lived was going to keep himself out of trouble this year. He would always be there for him if he did get in to trouble, of course. But there was so much to think of already...he didn't need any more.

Even now he was betraying his family, thought Dumbledore to himself. He should be thinking solely of them. And he was thinking of everything else. Just as he always had...

There was no more room in his life for mistakes. He had made so many when he had been young. He was meant to be wise and powerful now but he was only human. And he had a feeling he was going to make many more before his time on earth was up. But not where his sister was concerned. He was going to have to start taking care of number one. And to him number one was her.

Taking hold of her hand he smiled. It was warm. There was always hope. And love. As he

sat there at her bedside he didn't think he had ever loved her so much or tenderly.

"Precious girl..." he said to her smiling. "We will get through this."

He knew soon doubt would come. He would question everything. But in that one moment he felt that everything might be ok. And the real Ariana would find a way back to him. The one who had laughed, played and joked her way through life. He had to face up to the fact that from the age of six she had been a husk of the girl who had been born into that loving family. His mother had wanted the baby to be a girl. She had had two boys and now Kendra had wanted a girl to dote upon. To help the boys grow up respecting women.

And the joy on her face that day when Percival had first taken the boys into their room to see the baby. It broke Albus's heart. How could they have known?

As if he was lost in as a dream of the past he wondered if the hallows could have helped her. If he had been their master would things have been better?

No he had been fooling himself. Looking for an exit, a way out in to a better more glorious life. But what was more glorious than love and family. That had been a lesson he had learnt from a young witch he had once known. She had been beautiful, and strong willed and

courageous. And she had given up her place in the world so her son might go on.

Lily and James had known more loved in those few years they were together than he had known in one hundred. That had to change.

Dropping a kiss into his sister's hair as if it was a falling star, he smiled. It was indeed going to change.

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Sirius went to the Hogshead. He had a feeling Aberforth was going to need to talk. And so did he. He wanted to understand more than he did about Ariana. It wasn't fair what she had to go through. Surely there was a way they could stop it.

As he walked through the village down to the pub he noticed a cold chill in the air. Winter was on the way for sure. It wasn't so long till Halloween. Then they were going to know who was the Triwizard champions. That was going to be something. Now he wondered if any of the Dumbledore siblings were actually going to be able enjoy i,.

Judging by the look on Aberforth face when he got there he would say not.

Already by the time he got to the bar Aberforth had got a drink for him.

"I didn't thank you for what you did for my sister. I am grateful to you." he said to him. He had stayed with her when others would have turned and run. "Not a lot of people would want to get involved with someone who is like her and yet you and Harry do." he said to him.

"You don't have to thank me. She is such a sweet little girl." he said to him.

"You don't have to tell that to me. She's my darling...and she is coming home." he nodded. He wasn't going to let her waste away at that school he had made his mind up.

Sirius didn't like the sound of that. She had come so far on her journey. She had really begun to get to grips with what she had been doing just before the attack. She had been normal...almost. She had been as normal as Harry. That wasn't very normal, he knew but they had had a bond due to there uniqueness. He couldn't pull her out. Not now.

"Aberforth you cannot let her give up now, you can't take her out of Hogwarts. That would break her heart, she is becoming someone of her own when she is up there, please let her stay."

"No." Aberforth said to him. His mind was made up. His brother couldn't take care of her.

"But –"

"No." he said furiously. He didn't need Sirius telling him how to take care of Ariana. "Do you know what I remembered most about my childhood, of my late teens?"

"No." Sirius said as he had a sip of his bottle. He wanted to get to the bottom of what was going on and so he sat and he waited to listen. He wanted to hear this.

"I remember Albus and the look of disappointment on his face when he worked out he couldn't go on the world trip he had been planning for when he left Hogwarts. It had been all he had talked about all the way through his seventh year!" he said. "Do you know why he couldn't go?"

"No." Sirius said to him quietly, but provocatively,

"Because of our girl, our Ariana. She was sick by then you see. She couldn't go any where. Our mother had died. He had to step up to the mark and be a man for the first time in his life and look after her. He hated her." he shook his head.

"Albus loves Ariana to death, he loves the bones off the girl any one can see it." Sirius said. It was the truth. Albus was so affectionate with her.

"Now day's maybe. But not back then. She was the source of all his woes." He recalled.

"I can't image the thought of any one hating her, but even if he did - he was young." He tried to defend Albus.

"So was I. But I loved her. I was there. I wanted to protect her and love her, and cover her in cotton wool." he sighed. When he thought of how much he had loved her it had ached inside of him.

"He detested being home. He hated both of us - didn't want us, or need us for that matter. Hated family. Hated home. Loved only power - we weren't what he wanted." he sighed. "We were what each other wanted though."

He wasn't a romantic. He had always been practical. He had never fallen for anyone. Never liked girls. Or boys. If he had had a love of his life then it was his sister.

"We were the weight about his neck. If I didn't know better then I would think he was glad when she got sent to the future." he said. Maybe he would be able to take care of her better now. But the trust for him was gone.

"She belongs with me here where she can be loved and protected." He concluded. He knew it was true in his heart.

Sirius didn't now what to think. Why would he say it if it was not true. And he knew how it was not to be believed. And who really ever knew what went on behind closed doors? Could you ever really know some one? He didn't think Aberforth would lie, he wasn't the type. And in him, he saw himself. A man who felt a paternal love even though he was not a father, all he wanted to do was protect a child from harm. Who could blame him? After everything she had seen and been through.

"She has been doing so well." he defended her. Sirius didn't want all that to come to nothing now. "You can't just make her give up now." he said to him. The girl had been beginning to dream of something

more than a nut house in her future. She had been given hope. He didn't want it to be taken from her, not now. She was so capable when she was well. It would be an injustice if she should leave school now.

"I am not going to make her do anything," he said. She was going to want to get out of Hogwarts, he was sure.

"Let it come from her. If she wants to come back then that is fine. We all know that is her decision - but if it comes -"

"Sirius. I have got her this far," growled Aberforth. "I need nobody telling me how to bring her up."

"But you and Albus are bringing her up together." Sirius reminded the aging man. "It isn't just you."

"Have you listened to anything I have said?" he said to him.

"I am just saying what I know as an outsider." Sirius sighed. He just wanted to help.

When Ariana woke up she found she had been moved from the hospital wing and was back in the room in her brothers rooms

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When Ariana woke up she found she had been moved from the hospital wing and was back in the room in her brothers rooms. She was back where she had been in the summer. For a moment it seemed as if it was still summer. As if school had not begun yet. She felt clearer then she had in a few days but still exhausted. It was then everything that had gone on came back to her. And she knew it was not still summer.

She had got ill and she had let everyone who had helped her get this far down so much.

Running her hands through her hair, she shook her head. She felt so guilty. She felt as if the attack had been her fault. She had lost her head. She should have stayed calm. Anything but let everyone down. That was what hurt the most.

Looking about she saw Sirius was sitting in the chair by her bed. He had been with her when she had had the attack. He had seen her at her worse. And he had stuck by her. He was really something.

She offered a small smile.

"Hey you," he said to her gently.

"What happened? How long have I been asleep." she asked.

"It's been two days since you got sick." He replied sympathetically.

She nodded as she got her bearings back. It seemed longer some how.

"Where are Albus and Aba?" she asked him.

"Aberforth is at the pub and Albus is sorting things out for the tournament. But they have been with you most of the times." Sirius explained to her.

She nodded.

She felt so humiliated. She felt everything, all the hard work that well everyone had done had been for nothing. She shut her eyes and turned away. Figuring out what she was thinking Sirius looked desperately for a way to calm her. She had done nothing wrong and what had gone on had not been her fault.

"Hey you, don't look away. Don't be embarrassed Ariana. Not in front of me, you have nothing to be embarrassed about." But that was obviously not the way she saw it. Shaking, she begun to cry. It was all she could do, she thought to herself. Cry. She was such a baby at times. Yet she couldn't stop the desperate tears. "I am so sorry Sirius." she said to him.

"I told you, you don't have to be." he said to her gently, trying to comfort her. He knew he wasn't good at it. He had never been a great comfort giver. Maybe if he had raised Harry he would have been more sensitive. But he wasn't.

"Ariana?" she heard a voice say as the door opened. It wasn't Sirius. It was Aberforth.

"Aba," she said pathetically as he came towards her. She had never been so glad to see him she thought to herself.

"Oh my poor baby sister," he cooed as he came over to the bed. Sirius had never heard his voice so tender. The rough barman was not one for sentiments. Unless it was towards her. "I am so glad to see you have decided to wake up. Do you know how scared you had me when I heard what had gone on." he asked her. She shook her head and tears fell on to her cheeks.

"I didn't mean to it just sort of happened. I couldn't control it." she said to him. She was really shaken up.

"Well that's ok. No one thinks you did this on purpose, and none of it is your fault." he reassured her.

Wrapping his arms about her he kissed her forehead. This was all going to be over for her soon he thought to himself. No more worries and no more stress. Just a nice simple quiet life, the two of them. It was what she needed. "Breathe Ariana." he said, feeling how panicked she still was as she continued to cry. She needed to take deep breathe as there mother had taught her to do when she had been young.

Sirius on seeing he was clearly no longer needed left them to it. They needed time alone and Dumbledore had to be told she had woken up. He was going to be relieved.

Ariana did as she was told and tried to take control of her body again.

"There's a good girl. Don't worry, I am here and I am not going any where till you are ok..." he said to her quietly. "My Ariana." he said as he felt her collapsed heavy into his arms. He forgot how tired she used to get when she had been young and she had had an attack. She had had to be in bed for days afterwards sometimes. Their mother had said she had made herself sick by getting so wound up and she probably had. But who could blame her. It was beyond her control, and he knew that. He knew everything about her, he thought to himself and about her illness. And that was why she had to come home and be with him again.

"You have a sleep my darling. And everything is going to be ok." he said. When she had been young her mother had reassured her everything would be fine too.

How much did she remembered of Kendra, he wondered to himself? If anything. Sirius said she had cried out for her when she had been ill. Was she every going to be able to accept that their mother was gone for good?

He doubted it. She had believed when she had been small if you wished for something long and hard enough that you would get it. When she had been five she had sat up wishing for a toy all

Christmas night. Luckily her mother had got it for her. That time she had been allowed to keep her innocent eyes. The next year she wasn't going to be so lucky. She hadn't even been able to understand what Christmas was...

"A cuppa soup. It isn't much, but its some sort of food and it is tomato. Will you please try and have some ?" said Aberforth as he carried it in to his sisters room. Albus was back with them now and was sitting by her bed. Knowing with the two of them there and her having just been so ill, she knew was never going to win the argument. She nodded. It was the only thing she could do.

"How are you feeling now Ariana." asked Albus gently.

"If I am honest I have to say I don't know. I just feel a lot of things." she said to him as she sighed sitting up warm in bed. Outside she could hear people laughing. And there she was sitting in bed like an old invalid. Old before her time. She wanted to go out and find her friends and go and have fun. But even if her brothers would say yes to that she knew she was physically still to weak.

"I think that is to be expected. No one saw what was going to happen so near in the future, and less of all you." he said kindly and she nodded. But with him it wasn't as it had been with Aberforth. She felt as if she had let him down. She felt as if he was disappointed. She knew she was most likely imagining it. He wasn't like he had been when he was young. Not now and he had proved it to her on a number of occasions. But the moments of there childhood when he had been angry had indented on her for ever.

"What is going to happen now" she said to him.

"I think that is really up to you." he said. "You can do as you wish. You can recover here and then go back to class. You can go to the Hogshead and recover before coming back to school. Or you can go back to the hogshead permanently." he said to her looking back at Aberforth who nodded encouragingly. She had to come back in his mind. It was the right choice for her. Albus had a different view.

"You have had a good shot at school. No one could think ill of you for coming home."

"I don't think I want to yet," she said to him. Going home would be like giving up." And she had never been one for that. No she had to carry on. She wasn't done with learning yet, of that she was sure. She had to give it a fair shot. He had been right when he had said that at the beginning of term, a month ago. And the pub was always going to be there as a fall back plan. But she was not quite ready to fall back yet. She had had a set back. That was all. She was sure of it.

Albus beamed. He had been right. She did want to carry on for a while yet. He knew she was going to pull through for him. On the other hand Aberforth looked appalled at the thought of her staying on but it was too soon to give up. She had to go on for as long as she could.

"I think you are making the right decision." said Albus to her.

"Well Ariana I have got to say this." said Aberforth to her. If he didn't then what sort of brother was he? If he didn't give her the advice he thought she needed. He would only regret it if he didn't. "I think this is all going to be too much for you and that you should come home. If it is seeing Harry, Ron and Hermione that is worrying about, not seeing them, they can visit every weekend. But if I told you I thought you carrying on was a good idea then I think I would be failing you as a big brother. That is something I swore long ago I would never do sweetheart." he said to her. She could tell he was serious. So she had one brother telling her one thing and the other said the opposite. So who did she trust to give her the best council on this matter? Who had her best interests at heart? She was sure that they both did. They wanted the best for her.

"I need to think about this." she said to them.

"Well, of course, it is going to take some time." Albus shrugged. He appreciated that. It was a big decision. "Now drink your soup dearest." he said to her with a smile. She nodded and did as she was told but kept her gaze away from Aberforth. She had always done as he had told her too. She trusted him. But she wanted to carry on at

school and prove to him he was wrong and she could cope. She didn't want to hurt him. But she had to do this.

On Tuesday, four days after the attack Harry found Ariana down by the lake. She always seemed to go there when her heart was hurt and when she had to think. It was her favorite place in the school grounds. He had been told by Sirius that she was considering dropping out of school. Maybe it was for his own selfish reasons but he did not want her too. The two of them were so close and he didn't want her to leave him there. She wasn't like the others. She didn't try to understand what she knew she couldn't. and to her he wasn't the Boy Who Lived. He was Harry. Just Harry. Since she had come he had begun to understand what the Weasley brothers felt for Ginny. When you thought someone needed your protection that you thought you would do almost anything to give it to them. To keep them safe and out of harm.

He still felt awful about what had happened. He was still sure he should have gone after her. Not ignore it as he had. He had been selfish and wrong.

"Hello stranger," he said as he came up behind her.

Turning to see him she smiled. She had needed a friend who was not part of her family.

"I thought of that day in summer when we met down here. That is why I came," she said to him. "It was so peaceful, do you remember?"

"Yes." He said. No one else would have thrown him in to conversation. But she cared nothing for niceties.

"Harry what so you think I should do . Do you think Hogwarts is the right place for me?"

"Of that I am certain." he nodded. He wanted her to stay. She was part of his life.

"I think so too. But Aba wants me to duck out. It is only because he loves me, I know that. But Harry it is to late for me to give up every

thing I have worked for. It has only been a month. But I feel as if I am different person from the one who you met, in the woods. Tell me you agree, for I would have you do so.”

She still spoke at times as he imaged someone of the Victorian period would have.

“I do, Ariana I really so. You keep going and you can do anything. That is what I have learnt since I left my aunt and uncles.” he said to her.

“You know me Harry.” she said to him. “I think you know me better than I know myself.”

On that he could not agree. Something’s he did know but at other times she was a riddle to him. There was so much he didn’t know about her. And that he had a feeling he was never going to know. “All I can tell you is what I think is right. I might be wrong.” he shrugged. It was after all, Hermione who got everything right, not him. But she meant a lot to him. He didn’t want to bring anymore pain to her.

“How am I going to tell Aberforth I am not coming back to the pub?” she questioned him. Then her mind was made, he grinned. She was going to stay.

“He is going to understand in time. I think once you get into the swing of things again you are going to be fine.”

“I hope so.” She said giving him a nervous smile.

Please review!!

Chapter 22

"Please I am asking for your blessing Aberforth." said Ariana as they stood in the bar together. She had gone to him two days after she had made her decision with Harry about staying on at Hogwarts. She had had to screw herself up to it, telling him. She felt as if she was letting him down or she was being ungrateful. He had always been there for her and now she was ignoring what he was saying, something she had never done before. She was going against him. She so wanted him to understand. School was more than about learning for her. It was about getting as far away from the girl she had been . The one who had the attacks. She didn't want to be her. Not any more. She didn't like her.

He looked at her. His girl was making a mistake and he knew it. This wasn't the way forward for her. But it did not change the fact he could not deny her, when she asked him for something. He never could. She was so innocent, so sweet, so sincere. She didn't mean any harm. Only good. He wished, she saw this wasn't the right way. But what could he do?? Push her away, tell her she was wrong. No. he couldn't hurt her like that.

"I want to give it to you. And if this is what you want then I think I am going to have to support you for I am not going to let you go up to the castle with out it. So yes I am going to give you my blessing. But I also want you to know you can still come home the moment you get scared. What happened Ariana, it shook you up and I do not want to see you like that again. Do you understating?" he said to her. He didn't want any of them to have to go through it ever again.

"Yeah, yeah I do." she said to him. Of course, she understood. She didn't want it to happen either.

"I just want to keep you safe." he reiterated. He put his hand of her head gently and stroked her hair with a loving smile on his face, but she saw sadness in his eyes. She didn't want him to be sad. There was nothing to be sad about.

"I know you do. And I appreciate it. I am glad you look out for me. Make me feel safe. Just like papa used too." she recalled. He looked like there papa too now, she thought to herself. More so than Albus.

"And I am glad I can make you feel like that." he said as he gave her another hug. He hoped he made her feel like that for ever. "I just hope it is enough."

"Albus I know that we are going to have to use another potion for me to stay stable. When is it going to be ready?" Ariana asked. She had had to ask.

She wanted to know.

In herself she felt as if she was ready to go back to class. She wanted to return to school life. She missed her friends. She missed being in class. She missed being a child. She had been one, if only for a short time when she had been with her friends her age. She wanted it all back once more. She had begun to fit in. Slowly, but she had.

"It is going to take a few more weeks." he said to her, wishing it would come sooner, now that it was the only thing holding her back. He was as frustrated as she was.

"In what time I might have another attacked." She sighed, annoyed. She just wanted to have it and get well.

"But if you try and keep calm sis."

"You know that I do. But you know it isn't my fault it isn't as if I don't try to keep myself calm."

"I know you do and you know I have complete respect for you. But darling this is so important for you." he said sympathetically.

She nodded.

Maybe Aberforth was right. Was she doing the right thing coming back here, she really didn't know, not any more? She was so eager, and yet she knew she was putting others in danger too. She was

hardly the safest person to be about. What if she hurt someone she loved?

“Ariana you are being so brave.”

“I am doing what ever other kid my age is doing. There is nothing brave about it.” she said bitterly. She was doing nothing special. She wanted it to be no big deal. Only it always would be.

“But you are not every other fifteen year old are you?” he muttered.

She shook her head. She really wished she was. She wished at times she was any one else.

“Then, accept trying to keep calm, what do I do in the mean time?”

“You try to get on with your studies.”

She nodded. It was all she could do and she knew it. She felt despair wave over her body. She wanted more. But fear was ever present.

“You’ll get there Ariana.” Albus said on seeing her so distressed. He believed that.

-

Ariana found herself in the common room. She had not yet been aloud to return to the dorm room but she had been given permission to visit her friends. It was a relief.

Ginny, Harry, Neville, Hermione and Ron walked in to find her there.

“Hey,” she said as she saw them. Apart from the six of them it seemed most of the rest of the house to be out the tower, enjoying the weekend.

Harry was the first one over at her side to give her a hug. He had never easily given affection but with the girl he looked upon as a sister it was easy. He had been worried about her since she had

been gone. Embracing him she sighed. She wished none of this had happened. But there was not a lot they could do about it now.

"How are you doing?" she asked Harry.

"I think I should be the one asking you that don't you?" he asked.

She shrugged. She really just didn't know any more.

"I'm ok." she lied to him. It was the easiest thing to say. And she was sick of saying how wound up she was.

"You can say the truth is you want too." he told her.

"I would if I knew what it was."

So much had gone on and she felt weak. She didn't want to talk about it. Not any more.

"Tell me about what has been going on here." She changed the subject.

"Not a lot, it is just the run up to the tournament." He shrugged.

She nodded. She wondered how much she was going to be to join in with now.

"Has it been interesting?"

Probably, thought Harry, but he had been so distracted by his worry for her he had not taken that much notice.

"No, it isn't any thing special Ariana." he shook his head.

"Well that's - good I suppose that I am not missing out. Still if it isn't interesting it is going to be a bit of a boring year here at Hogwarts isn't it?"

"I don't think there is such a thing as a boring year at Hogwarts," Neville offered up.

"Well then we are going to have to see what this year brings aren't we," said Ginny.

The conversation stopped. Ari knew out of the group, only Harry really knew what was going on with her and the rest of them just felt awkward.

She looked for a way out of the situation.

"I think I am going to go out to the lake. I need a bit of fresh air."

Harry nodded. The rest of the others stayed behind.

"I don't think that lot like me much." she admitted to him as they walked side by side.

"They like you." He tried to reassure her. They did he was sure of it.

"I make them feel awkward. I am surprised I don't make you feel awkward at times." she said to him. It was the truth. He hadn't grown up about her, he didn't know everything. Sometimes she said or did things when she was with him. How did he put up with her? Why? What did he get out of it all? She wondered...

"I was there with you all summer when you arrived. I was there with you from the first night, you couldn't make me feel awkward just by being about. Don't you remember." he asked as they stood by the lake together. Their spot. "

Not really. I remember Sirius bring there. But not you oddly enough. My first memory of you is at the party."

"Our birthday one."

She nodded. "Yup. I can't remember a lot about the summer. Harry what if I am getting worse again." she said to him. "I don't want to be mad Ariana any more. I don't like her."

"Then who do you want to be."

"I want to be Ariana the Gryffindor. The student. The mate." she said to him.

"So be her. Try to put it all behind you and carry on." he said to her. It seemed to him there was nothing else for it.

"I don't know if it is going to be so easy." she said to him.

"You can try and make it that easy. If this is going to work you have to try and believe in yourself."

"I don't think there is much to believe in."

"I do."

He looked at her. She was among the strangest people he had ever met. She was new to him, as Hogwarts still was every day. She was so talented, or she could be he thought to himself. She had many people about her who believed in her. He was always going to count himself as one of them.

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Potions.

Ariana was heading back to class.

She didn't want to go in with the first years still, especially not for her first lesson back but she had no choice. She had to start back some where and if she didn't get in to Snape's lessons soon then she was never going to catch up. And that had to be number one priority.

She was still living in the room with her brother. She had wanted to move back into the dorm for what felt forever. He didn't think she was ready for it. She did though. She was more than ready to go and be with her friends.

Sitting this time at the back of the room she tried to keep out of Snape's vision. But it didn't help that she found it harder to read the board and see what she was trying to write.

Believe in yourself she thought and she knew she had to try. Effort was going to be everything for her over the next couple of weeks. And then she hoped everything was going to be good again. Like it was before she had had the attack. Getting back to that point was her main goal. Just to be like she had been before it had all gone so wrong. I'd be enough.

Snape came around the class to look at their work. Looking to her side she could see the first year by her side had done a lot more than she had.

And he had already humiliated one first year for not doing enough. She was sure she was going to be in trouble with him.

When he looked at her work though he didn't say anything to her. He just walked on past. Some times she wished he would say something to her though. He didn't bully her. But he made her feel at times she wasn't even there. And at times that could be worse.

At the end of the class she slopped out and up to met the others for lunch. She'd sit down, have a sandwich and get back to how she was. She had done it before. She could do it again.

Chapter 23

Ariana walked in to Albus office. She had got a message by owl from him when she had been in the library trying to get more work done. She felt she wasn't going to catch up with the rest of her year group completely though she didn't seem to be doing too badly at the practical side of Herbology. There was some hope there she supposed. That kept her strong. And Hagrid was always praising the effort she was putting in his class. He gave her confidence. But with Transfiguration and Potions, which were her two hardest classes she felt as if she was falling even further behind. Which wasn't helpful when exams were just already eight months away as Hermione had kindly reminded Ron and Harry that morning at breakfast. It hadn't been what she wanted to hear.

Walking in to the office she saw he was not on his own though. He was with Pomfrey and Snape as well as Aberforth who had come up. This could only mean one thing. The new potion was ready. And she was more than willing to have it. A smile spread over her face.

"Ariana." said Albus to her smiling.

"I came as soon as I could." she nodded to him, putting her bag down eagerly. .

"Thank you darling. I guess you know why I have called you here."

"Is it the potion is it ready?" she asked impatiently.

"Yes it is." said Albus to her.

"This one is a lot stronger than the last Ariana." said Pomfrey to her. "I don't know how long it is going to sustain you for. We can hope for longer than the last once. But I think what we can be sure about is it is going to work very differently to the last one. How ever if everything goes well then you might be able to go back to the dorm room. Your brother has told me how much you want to. So lets see if we can get you back there shall we." she asked her kindly.

"Yes please." She nodded.

"The potion is going to taste quiet bitter, Ariana, so be ready for that ok," she said to her.

"Ok," Ariana smiled and looked over at Aba to give her self a bit of confidence. He was there with her. Then he couldn't still be annoyed with her for returning to school. He must have forgiven her.

Madam Pomfrey was right. The potion said taste far fouler than the first one had. She got no pleasure out of it what so ever. But the result was what she was after.

"Can I have some water?" she said after she had had the first sip.

"I am afraid not till you are finished." said Snape to her. She looked at the sound of his voice, her eyes leaving the floor. His eyes were as ever unreadable. No malice was there she was sure, but he was not a compassion ate man either. She couldn't work him out. But at least he had acknowledged her. He had had too.

"It might interfere with the potion." Madame Pomfrey put in. Her tone was far more gentle than the one the potions master had used.

"You can take your time drinking it."

She nodded.

Aberforth came over to her side. Sitting by her side, he gave her gently encouragement, not that she needed much.

"You just take your time sweet heart." he said stroking her hair. She nodded and did as he said.

It took a while.

"It is just so bitter." she said to him. "I know it is good for me though." she smiled and he nodded.

"You just keep going lass." he agreed.

The five of them sat in the office watching her face periodically change between relaxing and screwing up every time she took another sip.

Albus watched her with pride. At the beginning of summer he wasn't sure she was going to cope. And yet she was proving them all wrong. Everyone who had been sceptical.

-

Ariana felt quite sleepy after she had had it. It had drained her.

As well as that she felt sick. Pomfrey had been right. This potion did make her feel different from the one before. It made her feel worse.

"I think I am going to sit down for a bit," she said as she returned to her brother's living room with Aberforth and Albus.

"You just take your time love." Aberforth said to her.

She nodded.

"Do you want anything Ariana. You can have a drink to take the taste away now if you would like one." Albus said to her.

She nodded gratefully. A drink would be very nice.

"A cocoa would be good," she said to him.

"I think we can stretch to one of them." he said as he kissed her forehead. His brave girl.

Aberforth who had been standing moved over to sit by her. She looked very tired. He was reminded of how she had been at summer. How she had fallen asleep so much. She was still ill, he was reminded, not that he ever forgot. He wondered if it would ever leave her.

"One more night up here I think." he said to her. There was going to be no dorm room that night. There might not be again. After the attack

last time. ...well they were going to have to see how things went with her before they made any big decisions about her rejoining the rest of the year properly.

She nodded.

"I don't think I mind that." she smiled as they cuddled up as if it was the old days. She remembered when they had lived at home with both their parents and she had had a nightmare or there was a thunder storm she had done into his room for a cuddle. He never minded her waking him up. She knew she had been distance from him of late but in that moment she was over come with affection for the brother who had always been there for her no matter what.,

"Your tired my sweetheart." he asked her and she nodded. "You have had quite a day once again haven't you?" he said.

She was always so busy now it seemed. And when she did get time to rest it was always because she had something to recover from.

She nodded.

"Will you stay with me tonight." she asked. She didn't want him to go. Having him there made her feel warm and loved. As if the fiercest storm could not hurt her because he was her protector.

Albus watching this exchanged was over come by the feeling off being left out. He had been the smart one when they had been small. But it hadn't always been fun. When they had been playing and he had wanted to join in...

"Of course I will sweetheart."

She nodded, comforted by the fact he wouldn't leave her and by the time her cocoa was ready she had already fallen in to a deep sleep.

-

It seemed to Ariana sometimes she had all the hard work and got to join in with none of the fun stuff. Her brothers and she had been

talking the night before and they had come to the conclusion she wasn't going to be going to the feast on Halloween to reveal who was going to be the champions of the three schools.

She wanted to go though.

"But I have had the potion now I am going to be ok." She insisted.

"But we have to be sure about that. We thought you were last time and you weren't." said Aberforth to her. He did feel sorry for her they had to be quite confusing for her as brothers at times. They were telling her to be a normal kid and then they were not allowing it to happen. . "Ariana I know you don't like this but it is just the way it has to be." he shrugged. "And besides with all the free time you are going to have you can get on with your studies." he said to her.

"What do you mean all of my free time? It is going to be for one night." she said to him. But then she begun to understand. It wasn't. "You are thinking about not allowing me to go to any thing to do with the tournament aren't you?" She asked her brothers.

This was so unfair.

"We don't know yet. We are just going to have to see how you go." Albus said to her and she signed.

"I know you are finding this all a lot to take in. But it is going to get easier." said Aberforth to her.

"When? You have been saying that to me for what feels like months sand then it never does." she said to him.

"Baby," he said to her. She shook her head. She didn't want him to brush her off any more. She felt they were tormenting her. As if they were dangling food in front of her and then taking it away. And she was so hungry to be part of the school. So hungry to be like all the other students.

"Don't." she replied to him.

“Ariana.” he sighed as he put his hands on her shoulder.

“I just want to be normal and do what I have too.” she sighed. To make them happy. And to make them free from worrying over her.

“That is all any of us want for you as well. But sweetheart this is all going to take - “

“Time. I know.” she said in her frustration.

He put his head in his hands.

“I need you to be patience Ariana. Can you do that for us?”

“I am going to have to, aren’t I?”

But she had been doing so for months. She felt tears well in her eyes and she let them tumble down her cheeks. She felt lost, alone. Backed into a corner by those she loved the most. The old familiar longing for her mother came over her heart. She let a sob out. When was it going to end?

-

“Ariana?” asked Harry.

They were in the library. It was getting on for eight o’clock. He knew she didn’t often stay up much later than that. Dumbledore was going to be worrying if she didn’t get back soon. He had been watching her study and he knew she had been so immersed in what she had been doing she hadn’t thought to check on the time.

“Yeah?” she said not taking her head out the book.

Knowing she was going to object to him telling her what to do, as so many others seem to think that was there job at the moment, he sat down by her side.

“What are you doing?”

"Trying to be a bit more positive like we said I was going to be." she said to him.

Showing him the transfiguration text book.

"Do you have McGonagall tomorrow then?" he asked.

She nodded. "I think she is getting annoyed at me. She knows I had the set back of the attack and she had been really cool about it all but I have not done any magic all term. She wanted to get me doing some in September and I had such trouble with the reading we had to get through the theory first and I still don't get it. But Harry - I am trying."

"I know you are." he said to her. They could all of them see she was. He took her hand and she shut her eyes. "I just want it all to be done." she said to him.

"I know. And one day in the future you are going to look back at what your doing and be proud."

Ariana walked in to McGonagall room

Chapter 24

Ariana walked into McGonagall's room. She had got transfiguration lessons. She didn't want to go into it but she had to. She was going to be using magic today. She told herself she was using her mother's wand to try and make it better for herself. But it didn't work.

She just felt nervous. In fact, she was petrified.

"Hello," she said as she crept in quietly, hoping she wasn't there. No such luck.

"Miss Dumbledore," the stern teacher said to her.

"Are you ready for your lesson?"

"As ready as I am ever going to be." she said to her.

"Try to say it a bit more positively."

She knew she was nervous but she had to try and over come it if their lesson was to be a success. She gave her an encouraging smile.

"Today you are going to try and turn a needle in to a match."

Ariana nodded to her.

She understood.

She had been told this last lesson. She knew what she had to do.

"What you have to try and do more than anything is not to panic."

She knew that. "I'll try not to. I will do my best"

But she knew at times her best wasn't enough.

She had to do as she was told.

McGonagall nodded. That was all she had ever wanted from her students. The best they could give her.

"Take your time, don't rush it." she said as she put the needle on to the desk.

Ariana nodded and took her wand out. Her mother's wand. She felt as if in that moment she was being watched by her mother and her father. She felt as if the wand gave her some connection to her. It almost felt as if Kendra had never been gone. She wasn't there physically, but spiritually she had never left Ariana. They were together still.

She shut her eyes. She had to do this. For her mother she had to do this.

She had been practicing the wand movements. She knew she could do this.

Repeating the word she had been she kept calm and she tried to do the spell. In her heart she knew it.

With all her might she wished it would work and that everything was going to go her way. For once she may be might have some luck.

She opened her eyes.

Before her lay a match stick. She had had her eyes shut and she had missed the first time she had done magic. But it hadn't hurt. She had used her natural ability. In a good way. She'd done it! She really had!

"I did it." she said quietly. She said it quietly, for she was in disbelief. She had actually performed magic. She had taken her first step towards being a witch.

"Yes Miss Dumbledore." said McGonagall equally quietly. They were both in shock. She had done as she had been told. And she had done it well. She had used magic. In a good way. "Oh miss Dumbledore! You did it!"

She felt as if she could cuddle her. She was delighted for her.

Ariana felt tears well in her eyes. Only this time they were tears of joy – and sadness. Her family had missed it.

“I did, didn’t I?” she said.

”I was there with her and I just could not believe what had happened.” said Ariana. It was the weekend. She had been told next week she might be allowed to go back to the dorm next week.

But before she had gone back to the pub one last time. She had wanted to tell Aberforth how she had got on in transfiguration. He was so proud of her. But it didn’t subside his fears for her.

“Well I am proud of you and I am happy for you my little one, but I still want you to just take your time and to be careful.”

“I am going to be, you didn’t have to worry about this.” she said to him.

Kissing his cheek she kept a smile on her face.

She was doing what every other kid her age was doing for the first time in her life. And she was loving it.

Giving her a cuddle, he smelt her hair. Was she a more comfort to him now than he was to her he wondered? She was growing up so fast in his eyes. He shook his head. He knew he saw her more as a daughter than a sister now. His love had turned paternal. Maybe it was his age. But he didn’t want to see her grow now. He wanted her to be small, safe forever.

She snuggled in to him though like she always had. Some things he hoped would never change.

She was also quite glad she had gone home. She knew she wasn’t going to be allowed to get involved with the tournament, and they had a feast tonight to tell the school who were going to be the champions.

It was best for her to be out the way. Had she been in the tower she would have gone mad she felt. She didn't want to be left out.

"I think I am going to do some homework." she said to him. She had plenty to do. McGonagall didn't want to slow down the pace now they were making progress. Quite the opposite she wanted to speed it up.

"It's Saturday night!" Aberforth told her. When he had been at Hogwarts the thought of working on a Saturday was unbearable, he just wouldn't have done it. He had always made sure he had it as a day of rest. Most had it on a Sunday he knew but he preferred to chill on a Saturday.

"And." she shrugged.

"Wouldn't you rather be playing games or chatting?" he asked. Surely there was something more enjoyable they could be doing.

"I 'spose so." she muttered as she went over to the arm chairs and collapsed in to the one nearest the fire in her brother's small but cozy living room.

"Have you had a butter beer yet sis?" he asked. He didn't remember giving her one over the summer. He didn't know what made him think of that, apart from when he had been her age it was his favourite drink.

"No, what's that?" she asked.

"It is a sort of rite of passage for every Hogwarts student." He chuckled.

He thought back to when he had begun Hogwarts and he had been allowed into Hogsmeade for the first time. It had been in his third year. He hadn't known it at the time but that village was to be his home for the rest of his days. He had seen the Hogshead for the first time. It had been an old run down building even then. It had been Albus who he had gone in to town with for the first time. It was on one of those rare occasions when the boys had been getting on. Ariana had been

going through a good spell at home so the boys didn't feel too bad about going out to have some fun. They had gone up to the Old Snitch, which had been a pub. Of course it was long out of business now. It was a shame he thought. He had liked that bar.

It had been in there where he had his first Butterbeer. He remembered the first time the liquid had run down his throat and warmed him through. He didn't think he had ever enjoyed a drink so much. Of course it wasn't strong. Not like the stuff he had today if he wanted to get away for a while. But for the thirteen year old Aberforth it had been more than enough.

"I'll go get you one so you can see." he said to her, kissing her forehead before he left.

Clearly the way he had said it amused her because she had a smile on her face and she looked as if she was going to burst out laughing.

He loved it when she smiled.

It was like the sun to him. His sunshine.

There mama had sung that to them he remembered.

"You are my sunshine,

My only sunshine,

You make me happy when sky's are grey,

You'll never know dear,

How much I love you.

Please don't take my sunshine away."

Kendra's voice sung to her son in his head. She had been so beautiful and so young. When he had been a boy of seven she had seemed like a goddess to him. As firm as she was kind, strict and yet good fun for her children. She had valued nothing more than him and

his siblings, except there father. It had been a time of happiness. Yet it had all changed. And there mother had too. She had had to. There was no way for her to go on being who she had before everything had come to pass. So she had stopped singing.

Yet the mere thought of her ass she had been made her son smile. And comforted him.

He didn't know how possible it was but one day he hoped to see his sister like that. As a mother in a loving home, with a good husband. Maybe it was too much to hope for. They were not in an ideal world after all.

He walked into the bar and he grabbed one of the bottles. It was time for him to accept she was growing up.

Walking back in to the living room once he had trekked back up the stairs he looked at her for a moment. Her hair was let down so it fell down on to her shoulders. Her eyes were glazed with happiness mixed with tiredness, but she had a soft smile that reflected peace. She was peaceful.

He slumped down in the chair next to her and gave her the bottle.

"Are you not having one?" she asked.

"I think I am going to have some fire whisky instead." he said to her. Just the one mind Aberforth, he thought to himself.

She nodded and took the open bottle from him with a smile of gratitude.

"Well bottoms up." she said to him and begun drinking.

It succeeded it realizing her further. She found she liked the taste, and the feeling it gave her.

"Its good." she said to him.

"I am glad you think so." he said as a he looked in to the fire.

He still didn't believe she was back with him at times. He thought back to the days when she had first gone missing. He awoke with his sick feeling in his stomach. He forgot why for a moment. And then he remembered, and it was as if he had lost her all over again. For the rest of his life he had that. Even when he woke up that day he had felt despair. Till he realized he had no reason too. Not any more.

"But I didn't think people from our year could be a champion even if they wanted to be." said Ariana to Ron. She had just got back to school. It was Monday morning. And this was the news she begun he week with. That Harry. Her best friend Harry was the Gryffindor champion. There were two champions for Hogwarts

Yet even she knew that was against the rules.

"So did I." said Ron.

Ariana could tell by the tone of his voice he wasn't happy. This was getting to him.

But for another reason than it was to her. Something wasn't fitting in. Harry wouldn't put his name in. He had said as much to her over the summer. He wanted a peaceful year in which he could get to know his godfather.

He did not want to go in for a Tri Wizard tournament. That'd be the last thing he'd want.

"Where is he?" she asked. She had to get to him before the bell went. She had reading and writing first. If she was late maybe she would be able to explain to her brother...he'd understand...

"What?" asked Ron. "Aren't you annoyed with him?"

"No why on earth would I be." she asked.

"Because you are meant to be his friend and he didn't tell you he was putting his name in to the goblet." he said to her. She hadn't even thought of it like that.

Now she did, even then she was annoyed. Everyone was entitled to secrecy and privacy if they wanted it.

“No.” she said to him. “Besides, not even I’m mad enough to believe that.”

Ron looked at her as if she really was mad. Turning, she walked into the great hall. She guessed Ron and Harry weren’t talking.

As soon as Harry saw her he got up. He wanted to tell her everything. She was unbiased in a way. She would give him her advice on how to handle it. If not, at least she’d be a sympathetic ear. He only had one choice though. he had to go through with the tasks.

“What’s going on?” she said to him.

“Come on I’ll explain everything to you.” he said taking her by the arm.

They marched up to the common room where they sat down together and he told her the events of the weekend. How some how his name had got into the goblet of fire? He didn’t know how. It just had. And then, worst luck it had come out. It was no coincidence, he was sure. He was going to have to compete. Suddenly Ariana wished she was allowed to be involved. She wanted to be there for him. She would badger her brothers. Even if she was just in the crowd she was going to be therefore him. As he had been for her.

But there was so much about it all that didn’t make sense. No sense at all to her. It didn’t to the others either, she was sure. It wasn’t because she was mad.

“Ariana you do believe me don’t you.” he asked her desperately. “When I say it wasn’t me who put my name in the goblet.” He looked at her pleadingly. As if all that mattered for that single moment was her answer though she was shocked he doubted what it would be.

“Of course I do. I haven’t known you that long but I know you are not a liar. Why would you lie about this?” he shrugged. It’d make no sense. Not to her.

"If only everyone saw this as you do." he said to her.

"If only Ron did. I saw him in the corridor before I got to you." she said to him. "He seemed pretty wound up about the whole thing." she said to him.

"And that is why I didn't want anything like this to go on this year," he said to her. He had wanted to go through it quietly getting on with everyone. "What do you think I should do." he asked.

"The only thing you can. You have to go thought with the competition." she said. "What has Sirius said about the whole thing?"

"He is torn between delight and anger." he said to her. "He wanted me in ever since he heard there was going to be a Triwizard tournament. But then he wants to know who put my name in the goblet. I don't think he wanted it to happen like this."

"I don't think any of us did." she said to him, taking his hand.. "In the mean time. What d o we do." she asked.

The bell went.

There had to be some way of getting him out this, surely?

"Go to class."

Chapter 25

Ariana sat in Albus's office. After what Harry had said to her she had gone straight to him. She had to know what was going on. She wanted him to tell her he could sort it out. But the longer she was there the less likely she thought that was.

"So he has to compete." she said to him. Her eyes were wide with concern. She just like her brother didn't want this for Harry

"He has no choice." Albus informed her regretfully.

"But your our headmaster." she said to him, as if it made a difference. "Surely you can do something to get him out of this." she petitioned her brother. She had heard how great he was now. He had to be able to do something didn't he?

"If I could don't you think I would have done something by now?" he asked.

"But why not?"

"Because what is binding him to the competition is a magical contract." he tried to explain, knowing she would never be able to grasp the concept and what it meant.

"So break it."

If only it was that simple, thought Albus. Everything was so easy in her eyes. She saw the good and the bad, the white and the black. There was no grey with her.

"Darling..." he said to her. She knew that 'darling'. It was the tone he took when he knew she would never accept what he was saying.

"I know." she said to him. She had to drop it.

Intending to take her mind off of the subject he turned the topic of subject to her lessons. She was beginning to join up her letters now.

But even when they got into it, her heart wasn't in her lessons. Not that day.

"Is he going to be ok?" she asked Albus before she left.

"We can hope so." he said to her.

But what Ariana really couldn't stand was the feeling of being so useless.

Not wanting to study Ariana went down to Hagrid's. She didn't think if she had tried she would have been able to concentrate that day,

When she got there she was relieved to find he wasn't teaching. Hagrid was working in the pumpkin patch and greeted her warmly as she came towards him.

"Yer rite?" he asked her and she nodded in reply. "Not often I get a visit off of yer." he said.

"I'm sorry." She shrugged saying it only half heartedly.

"Yer alright?" he replied. "How have yer been?"

"Ok. I did my first piece of actual magic the other day." she said to him proudly. It was nice to give out good news for a change.

"Aye I know."

"You do?" she said to him curiously. She hadn't told him herself.

"Course I do. Yer brother told me. Dead proud he was an all. Couldn't talk for smiling." he informed her.

He was proud of her then. She smiled. She still didn't believe it at times. That he could be proud of her. When she looked back at there past relationship it wasn't a surprise. But all that was over now.

They were ok. Soon as she progressed they were going to be great.

"I just wanted to do something good for a change."

"What do you mean for a change." he said to her. The way he saw it she was very much like he was. They both aimed for good. Only things beyond their control took hold of what they were doing. But she got the job done. "The way I see it you do good a lot of the time" he said to her.

She blushed.

"Sirius and your brothers certainly think so. Me too. And Harry."

She smiled. When he said it like that she had quite a big circle of people about her. Like a strange sort of mismatch family. She only had one complaint about it. There were no other women. She missed having a woman she could go to as she had done her mother, she had Hermione to talk to of course. But it wasn't the same. She was her age.

"I am glad." she said to him. "Can I sit down here with you for a bit Hagrid. I don't have a class and I want to get out of the castle." she explained to him.

"Yer know yer don't have to ask lass." he said to her. His big beetle eyes were warm as he looked at her. He was so friendly, she thought to herself. Just like Harry and herself he knew what it was to be on the outside. To be different. And this gave them empathy for one another. "Why don't you go and put the kettle on?"

She smiled and nodded. That sounded good. "Ok."

For the rest of the morning she sat out with Hagrid enjoying the peace. It was quiet. Like there home had been she thought to herself. Her father had loved their garden. He had used to sit out there on a Sunday reading his paper...

For a moment a really vivid picture of Percival came in to her head. And she could make him out perfectly. As if he was still there. She smiled, as the autumn breeze blew. She still knew him in her heart.

Those who love us never truly leave us...

"Yer rite?" asked Hagrid as he saw the dreamy expression on her face. He had watched her some of the morning. The girl he had met in the summer was visible but fading in to a more beautiful, confident one. When he heard she had had the set back he had been scared she would let it bet her. But she hadn't. She had fought for her sanity. She was still fighting, determined mite that she was.

"Yeah I am fine," she said to him, "do you know what the time is?" she asked.

"It is getting on for twelve." he informed her.

"Then I have to be getting back to the castle." she said as she got up. She had to get some lunch. Then she had to do some work. She could not slack off all day.

"Thanks for this morning Hagrid. It has been nice." she said to him.

"Any time. Yer gonna have ter come down and see me more." he said and she nodded.

"I will." she said to him.

"Good." he replied as she turned to leave.

"Oh Ariana. Can yer do me a favour? Tell Harry I need a word with him." He had to get that message to him. He had to know what he had to fight. He knew about the dragons and he had to tell him. He knew it was against the rules. But Harry was a friend. Friends were more important than rules.

"Alright." She nodded as she run off.

-

"Dragons."

"You have got to be kidding me."

"I wish I were."

Harry and her Hermione stood in the common room. He had just been with Hagrid after Ariana had told him to go and see him. He was going to have to fight a dragon.

They haven't been kidding when they said the contest wasn't for the light of heart.

"Do you have any ideas of how I am going to do this?" he asked her.

"Not off the top of my head. But if they have given this as a task to you then it means somehow there is a way to do it. And I promise you we'll find it." she said to him.

The first task was coming up far too fast for Harry's liking.

There was something else he had to think of for the task though. It was just like getting past the dragons. He and Ariana had to find a way about the Dumbledore brothers. He hated deceiving the headmaster but she had told him she wanted to be there. She felt fine and she had been for days. This potion seemed to be doing its job. Why shouldn't she join in?

He had come up with a plan for that one though. He was going to lead her the invisibility cloak. That was going to be no good when he was fighting dragons. If they shot fire at him then they were going to destroy it. It was one of the only things of James's that he had. He wasn't going to allow it to be destroyed. It was precious to him.

But it could get her to the tournament. All she had to do was sneak out.

Initially when she was told of his plan she was opposed. Sneaking out was far too much deception. It was deception. And she didn't want to deceive Aberforth.

But then she didn't see any way out, it was the only way she could get to the task. And she wasn't going to miss it for anything.

So when she headed to the pub on Friday night after having been back in the dorm with the girl's for a couple of weeks, she had the clock in her bag.

She would return to the castle the next day.

"Do you know how your getting past the dragon?" she checked with Harry before going to met Aberforth. She wanted to know he had it all under control and on task day he was going to be fine

"Don't worry it, me, Hermione and Sirius have it covered." he said to her. "I'll be fine."

He didn't believe that in side for one minute. But he didn't want to worry her. Giving her a smile he nodded. He had to make her at least think he was confident about the task.

He would be fine.

"Just be there Ari."

-

On Saturday morning when Ariana woke up, for a minute it was just another weekend at the pub. She was going to collect any glasses her brother needed her too, she was going to get her homework done and then she was going to feed the goats.

Then she remembered what day it really was.

The day of the first task.

She had to try and sneak out of the pub.

Sitting up in bed she felt her stomach drop. She felt guilty before she had even done it. Surely that told her what she was going to do was wrong. And yet she wanted to go to the school so much.

She had to do it. For Harry she had too.

Besides, morning was going to be normal she didn't have to go out till twelve. She had to relax.

Getting up she dressed quickly in a blouse and a blue skirt that came down just below her knees. Brushing her hair she put it back in a pony tail before going out for breakfast.

It was obvious to her just how oblivious Aberforth was to what she was doing.

To him it really was just another day. He walked about with his work apron on, already ready to go down to the bar.

"I am going to be down there most of today. David flued me, he is sick. Are you going to be ok on your own?" he asked.

She nodded. At least that meant she didn't have to talk to him all morning. She was sure had she had too she would have let it slip out.

"I'll be fine." she said to him with a bright smile.

"That's my girl." he said as he headed towards the steps, but before he went down he turned back to her. "Listen Ari... I know today cant be much fun for you, with all your friends at the school going to the tournament, especially with Harry being so - involved in it. But I promise I'll make it up to you ok? We'll do something special tonight. Dunno what yet. You can pick." he said to her.

She nodded. She felt even guiltier.

"Its fine really."

"Ok, well I'll come check on you in a bit."

"Ok."

She felt sick. Maybe she should just tell Harry on Monday she hadn't managed to do it. That she had tried but she had failed. But then she wanted to be there for him. No, she had to do this.

Sitting down at the table she looked about and her eyes landed on a picture of her mother and father. They seemed to be looking disapprovingly at her.

“Oh come on,” she said to the picture. “He’s my friend.”

At twelve she snuck down the stairs in the clock. She had to get to the door so that she could walk out of it when some one came in.

Standing by the door she looked at Aberforth. He was stocking up from the cellar. He was working hard and his mind was peaceful, she thought to herself. And it was all because he thought she was safely upstairs.

The guilt hit again.

There were a few times when he looked over in her direction and she was sure he saw her. But how could he? She was covered, she thought to herself. She was safe.

She was being paranoid. She stood there waiting, wanting to be anywhere else in the world.

There were few others in the bar. Only a few of the morning drinkers as her brother called them. And those who had become dependent of it. Aberforth didn’t like fuelling there addition he said but it wasn’t his place to preach. Live and let live he had said to her. It wasn’t his place to deny them.

The door opened!

At last she was going to get out she thought.

The man came into the Hogshead, gave her brother a smile and held the door open. Ariana in her hurry to get out went for the door...

And bashed straight in to the next costumer coming in.

“What was that?” the women asked.

Put her hands out in front of her, she felt something and pulled in. Ariana knew the cloak had come off.

“Darling?” asked her brother from behind the bar.

For a minute time seemed to stop. Ariana hoped she had imagined it. But she knew she hadn't. She had gone too soon and she had been caught out. Her brother was going to figure out what she had been trying to do and he would be displeased. She'd never get to the tournament.

“Sorry.” said Ariana as she took the cloak back from the women, the apology being to both her brother and the women. She felt the tears in her eyes begin to well. She had let him down so much.

Aberforth looked from the garment to the girl.

The cogs in his mind turned. He figured out what she had been doing. It wasn't hard to do.

“Get upstairs.” he growled.

Shaking Ariana did as she was told. “Aba I'm sorry.” she said to him.

“NOW!” he yelled at her, understandably cross.

Every one was looking at them. Ariana rushed to the stairs and begun climbing them

Before she got to the flat, the last thing she heard her brother say was an apology to the customers. He was shutting up. He had a personal matter to attend to.

Chapter 26

"I didn't mean to let you down," said Ariana as Aberforth came in to the flat.

She didn't believe she had been caught so soon. She hadn't even made it out the bar. But now she had been she felt awful. She had lied to him or as good as. She knew he was angry. And that he had every right to be. She had done wrong.

"Sit down." he ordered her. There was no warmth to his voice. Only anger. There was nothing familiar there.

She did not move. She was too afraid of him. Suddenly in his rage he seemed terrible. She had never before seen him like that.

"SIT DOWN!" he roared.

She sat as she had been told. She didn't want him to yell at her. She couldn't stand people shouting.

"I told you how much I love, respect and how proud of you I am. Yet it seems you have no love or respect for me."

"You know I do." she said to him. Tears well up in her eyes. She felt so emotional. She knew she had been doing wrong. But she had wanted to be there for a friend. She had had the best of intentions. It wasn't as if she had been doing it for ill.

"No baby not any more. How could you try to sneak out Ariana. You are not a lying, stupid young girl. You are my good little one." he said to her.

He thought he didn't need to tell her about love and loyalty in the family. He was trying to hold together what was left of it. He thought she had been there with him.

"I am." she whispered. He knew she was in his heart. She was his sister who loved him above all others. But he was fuming.

"I am so angry with you right now." he said as he put his hand on the kitchen table.

"Right go to your room." he said to her. He didn't want to see her for the first time. Why hadn't she thought of the danger she had put herself in when she had tried to sneak out? All he had ever tried to do was protect her. "Go now please, I don't want to see you." he said to her.

She did as she was told as tears streamed on to her cheeks. She didn't want to be told that. It hurt he didn't want her. She ran all the way and when she got there she shut the door, sinking against it in floods of tears.

This time she could not say she hadn't meant to be bad because she had. She had meant to go about and betray his trust. She had been wrong and she had known it. She had no excuse.

So she sat there on the floor and cried. All she could do was wait for him to calm down. And she had no idea how long that was going to take because he had not been angry with her like this before.

"Aba..." she whispered softly.

But he didn't come.

-

Harry looked about the common room. She hadn't made it.

"Did you see her at all today Hermione?" he asked though in his heart he knew the answer.

"No. I don't think she got away from her brother, do you." she said to him.

He shook his head. Somehow that was a downer on the day for him. He had got past a dragon and yet she wasn't there with him to celebrate. She hadn't seen him.

He wished she had. It was at that moment that the common room portrait opened and he thought for a glorious split second it was her. She had got out, only late. And she had heard how well he had done and she had come to him.

The illusion was broken.

It was Sirius.

He had seen him in the tent after he had faced the dragon. He had told him to go and have a good night with his friends after he had checked he was ok.

So why had he come to see him so soon?

“Harry,” said Sirius as he came over. “Can I have a word?” he asked

“Yeah of course.” he nodded.

“I have something to do tonight. But I don’t want the world and his aunt knowing, so would it be ok if I used your dads cloak?” he asked.

Harry felt tongue tied and Sirius felt his heart sink. So what Aberforth had said to him in the fire was right.

“Idiot.” said Sirius as he figured out he really had tried to get her back to the castle.

He had put her in so much danger. God, if she had got out he dreaded to think what might happen.

“I want to see you in my office tomorrow Harry. We’ll talk about this then.” He couldn’t take him out the common room. He was his houses champion. But the next day they would be having words.

-

Aberforth breathed deeply. It was evening. He had not spoken to his sister for most of the day. But he didn’t want to go to bed with this

hanging over them. So he made her some soup and bread, for she had not eaten that day and took it through to her room.

He had calmed down.

He found her sitting up on her bed in her night gown. She had put her hair in plaits as she had been taught to be there her before bed. She looked just as she did every other night before she went to sleep.

And yet it hadn't been just any other day.

She said nothing when he came in and he knew he was going to have to make the first move.

"I thought you might be a bit hungry." he said to her as he nodded to the tray.

She looked up at him gratefully.

She would make sure she ate it all. She didn't want to upset him anymore than she already had.

"Do you want to tell me what today was all about?" he asked as he sat down and perched by her side on the bed. That was what his mother had asked him when he had been in t4roublw.

"Harry's my best friend." she said to him.

"I know he is."

"He was in danger. He had to face a dragon. I wanted to be there for him. If it was the other way about I know he would be there for Me." she said to him.

"And I suppose that makes it ok? Honey when would you ever face a dragon?"

"I don t know, but you take my point."

"You know what? I don't think I so." he said to her honestly. Just because she had lied to him didn't mean he was going to do the same. "If he was a real friend he would not encouraged you to lie to your family. He would want to protect you."

"Maybe that's why I like him. Because he isn't forever trying to protect Me." she shrugged. She was setting sick of being told she needed protection from the outside world all of the time. She knew it was true but she was still sick of it.

She didn't want the protection. She didn't want reminding.

"Stop being silly Ariana." He snapped at her. It wasn't what he wanted to hear.

"I am not being silly. I am trying to tell you how I feel."

"You know why I try to protect you. I lost you once and I am not going to let it happen again." So many emotions swamped his body. He didn't know what one to go with.

"No. I don't want you too. But you have to believe I am not going anywhere for it to be true. Otherwise we are never going to have peace." she said to him.

He looked her. Ever since she had been a baby he had seen her so fragile, precious. His baby sister. It wasn't just after the attack he had loved her dearly. It had been before. She had always since the day she had been born been his be all and end all.

He shook his head.

Reaching out to him she took his hand.

"I didn't mean to hurt you today. It wasn't what I meant." she said to him. "Only to be a good friend."

"You have to start thinking through your actions though. What if you had got out - what if you had then had an attack while you had been

covered up by the clock. No one would have been able to find you.” he said to her.

”I know.”

”I couldn’t have found you.” He insisted.

”Aberforth I know.” she said to him seriously. That had been a risk she had taken. And it had been a stupid one to take. She didn’t need telling that.

”You scared me.” he admitted to her. That had been why he had got so angry. Because he had been afraid.

”I didn’t mean too.” she whispered to him. A tear rolled on to her cheek.

”If you got hurt again I would never forgive myself.”

”But it wouldn’t have been your fault.” she said to him.

”I think it would have.” He was responsible for her. She obviously couldn’t be for herself. She had been through so much. Why had she tried to put herself through more?

”Well we don’t have to place blame. Nothing happened.”

He looked at her. She was right. She was fine. Nothing had happened and it had all worked out ok. He had been shocked at her behavior. But he thought to himself, she was a teenager. And if anyone had a reason to rebel it was her.

”Come here,” he said to her.

Wrapping his arms about her he kissed her forehead.

”I am sorry if I scared you earlier. It is only because I love you.” He promised her. He shut his eyes and tried to forget the events of that day. He didn’t want to remember.

"I know." she said as she held on to him.

She made a vow at that moment she would never try o deceive him again.

It really wasn't worth it. The bond they had was special and she didn't want to break it.

Chapter 27

Ariana walked back up to the castle. The weekend was over. She felt heavy hearted. She and Aberforth may have cleared the air but it didn't seem to make the guilt she felt for her actions go away. When she got to school she still had to try and face Albus. If Aberforth had got so angry with her then Albus was going to be furious. She knew it would be pointless just to not go to his lesson. That would be the worse thing she could do. She also had to see Harry. She wondered if he was going to be angry with her as well.

It really was one of those days when she should have just stayed in bed.

Going up to the dorm room she put her bag down on the bed. It was deserted. They had no doubt all gone down to breakfast to get on with the week. No one was there but her. Laying back she wished she could just go back to sleep. Just lay there...

But that would solve nothing.

She had to get through the day. Getting her things together she was going to need for the her lessons she solemnly walked out of the tower and straight up to her brothers office. She didn't want to ho down to breakfast. Even if she had been hungry that day she could not have faced it with everything hanging over her.

When she got there, she found Albus waiting for her.

"Your not at breakfast." she said to him. She had been expecting to find the office empty.

"Neither are you sweet. Do you want some tea." he asked.

She nodded.

"Are you mad with me?" she asked him. If he was she would rather get it out of the way.

"No why on earth would I be mad at you?" he asked her.

“Didn’t Aberforth tell you what I tried to do at the weekend?” she said to him shrugging.

“Oh that,” he said to her shrugging. Her minor indiscretion. He had seen it coming. “Aberforth said he had words with you about I already.” he said to her.

“Yeah he did.” she said thinking back to Saturday night and sighing unhappily. It had quite possibly been the worse night she had had since her return.

“Well I don’t think it would be a good idea that I did as well. Besides when it comes to you I never get to play good Auror. I’m always bad.” he said to her.

She smiled. That had been what there parents had said to one another when telling them off, ‘would you like to be good Auror or bad Auror?’

She grinned.

“There, that’s better. A frown doesn’t suit you sister.” he told her.

He conjured up the drinks.

She had thought he was going to be furious. But he was actually being cool about the whole thing.

He understood.

“I think at your age I would have done the same thing.” he admitted to her. He hadn’t been one to be left out. The rest of the school were enjoying something she was being excluded from. He knew the reason for this were good ones but it didn’t make it easier on her.

Of course their mother would have been far more serve than either of the brothers had been with her. Lying had not till her accident been allowed in the Dumbledore Household. Then it had ruled there lives and Albus had longed for the olds days back.

"Your trying to find your way and you are going to make mistakes of your own. As long as you understand why they were wrong when you look back that is all that matters!" he advised her as he looked across his desk at her. His eyes were kind and gentle as he looked at her and she was overwhelmed by him at that moment.

If she said her view of him had not been changed of him by Hogwarts she knew she we would be lying.. She saw him as a brother and a wise man now. He was great as Harry, Hermione and Ron had told her more than once. He had been there and he had done something with his life since she had been gone. It wasn't hard to see when he stood at the top of the hall in his almost majestic robes why so many admired and so many hated him. He had been successful in many respects and he had fulfilled every dream their mother had had for him.

"Thank you brother." she said to him.

He had told her what she had needed to hear. What she had wanted to hear...

"You're just finding your way Ariana. Learn lessons from your mistakes, don't maker them again and you'll go far."

#

It was later in the day in the library when Harry caught up with her. She had been studying when she had saw a shadow fall over her work and she had known instinctively it was him. He had been searching for her for most of the day but till then he hadn't been successful in finding her.

She looked up.

Ariana had wondered all day if he was angry with her. She was about to find out.

"Are you alright." she asked him.

He nodded. "Are you?"

"Yeah."

There had never been such a awkward moment between the two. Ariana couldn't stand it. He was the only one she felt she had connected with in her year really.

"I did try to get there." she said to him. She just hadn't managed it. She knew he would have and she suddenly felt a new wave of shame come over her. This time it was not for trying to get out. It was for trying to get out and not succeeding in it. He had asked her to be there. And she hadn't been.

"Its ok." he lied to her.

He didn't understand why he felt so wound up that she hadn't been. He had known there was a chance she wouldn't get there. It had been a risk.

But it was Ariana. The girl he was rapidly thinking of as his best friend along with Hermione and Ron.

A part of him felt they had grown up together. That summer they had both done a lot of growing up. And so in some ways they had. But in others he felt something new for her. A emotion he had never felt before. And he didn't know what it was.

"I swear to you, I did try Harry."

"I know you did."

She nodded. "From what I heard you did really well. I'm proud of you. The Gryffindor champion." she smiled.

Her champion.

The boy had done well.

"Thanks."

It felt to him as if that complement meant the world and more. It didn't matter that Sirius and he had had their first falling out over his behavior. That he had to work out the clue to the second task and that he had an essay for Snape to do. Ariana Dumbledore was proud of him.

That was all that mattered.

-

Sirius and Aberforth were in the Hogshead together. They seemed to be getting together more and more to moan over the children. Maybe it was because they were both new fathers in a way and could relate to one another on a level Sirius and Albus could not. He would never behave the way he did round Aberforth about Albus.

So the two of them sat at the bar drinking talking about the kids, and the stunt they had tried to pull.

"I couldn't believe Harry had been so stupid. He hadn't thought about what he was asking of her."

"And she should have foreseen what could have happened if things had gone wrong." Aberforth replied.

"But you never do see things like that at there age do you. I know me and James never looked for the danger. Only the fun."

"We had too, me and Albus. By the time I was her age she had been ill for a few years. I had to be sensible, we both did."

"But she can have the chance to have fun. Aren't you grateful for that?" Sirius asked.

He was glad Harry had that chance. And that it was with Ariana, he couldn't think of two more deserving people in the world, he shrugged.

Aberforth wasn't so sure.

They were the two most controversial students at Hogwarts. They were in the most danger. They had to learn to be careful some time. All they were was children. They were still fifteen. But soon no doubt next summer would come, and then the next. And they would then be of age.

-

What remained of the term seem to go quickly for both Ariana and Harry. They both had plenty of work to do and more often than not did it together. They ended up talking about any thing and everything though, the weather, family life before Hogwarts, the tournament. Work had to fit in round that.

There was only one thing they never spoke of. The attack that she had suffered when she had been young. He didn't think she would ever want to talk about it. He didn't blame her. And he didn't know if he could handle knowing what had gone on.

As term came to an end though there was an announcement made by her brother. There was to be a Yule ball at Hogwarts. All the champions needed a partner. It didn't take Harry long to work out who he wanted to take to the ball with him.

-

It was one of those rare weekends when Ariana had not gone home. Aberforth was working in the pub by himself. No one had got there yet and so he was alone. It was then that there was a knock at the door.

"Come in." he yelled.

He was surprised to see Harry Potter before him.

He had gone there with a specific mission. He hadn't wanted Ariana to be there when he had gone to her brother but he felt he had too. After all she was an old fashioned girl. And he wanted to get her to the unexpected task honestly, with no lies. And so he had had to go to her brother to ask to take her to the ball.

Aberforth was still bound to be angry he thought to himself over what they had done the last time. But he had to try.

“Sure can I talk to you?” he asked.

Aberforth nodded.

“Aye.”

“Its about the Yule ball and Ariana. You see I want to take her. And I want your approval.” he said to him.

Aberforth thought that if nothing else the kid had guts to come to him and ask. He surely knew he wanted to turn him away for what he had done. But he suddenly respected Harry more as well. He may have been wrong to try to persuade her to go the first task.

But now he was doing things right.

Chapter 28

Harry had a time frame the next week.

Early on Ariana told him she was going to be going home at the weekend as she had stayed at school the last one. She wanted to see Aberforth and the goats.

He had got permission from Aberforth to talk her to the ball. He hadn't believe it when he had. He had been sure the adding man would say no to him after what had happened in the first task. Now all he had to do was ask her. He felt coy about it. Her hadn't ever had to ask a girl out any where before. Let alone his best friend.

It was just Ariana, yet she was still a girl. He was beginning to see that as well.

When most saw her they saw her disability, but not him. Not any more. He saw someone who he believed to be – well, pretty. He hadn't seen someone like that before.

Sitting in the common room together he sighed. She sat with the end of her quill in her mouth looking hard at her parchment. He took the opportunity to take her in. Her blue eyes were so clear. So unlike they had been in September.

"I am going to be so glad when I get this essay done." She said to him.

"Yeah?"

"Yup. Its for McGonagall. Then providing I get no more then I am done with work for Christmas." she said to him. She had wrote it surprisingly quickly. She had got to grips with writing now. Reading she found harder. And she was sure she still didn't have enough vocabulary to be up with the first years. But that night she didn't care.

"You're lucky. I am not nearly done yet."

"It's cause you have s o many classes. You work hardly than me."

"I doubt that."

She looked at him for a moment. He had real faith in her and she knew it. Whenever she doubted herself he was always there with a comment like that to pick her up. He was extraordinary like that. Yet still just Harry.

"Are you going to be staying here for Christmas." he blurted out. She had too. And if she wasn't then he had to know.

"I don't know yet. I need to talk to Aberforth and Albus about it," she said to him obviously still focusing on the essay more than him. She wanted to spend Christmas with both of them really. They were both her brothers and they had had some wonderful Christmases when they had been at home with their mother and father. She smiled as she always did when she remembered the old days when they had truly been a family. Kendra and Percival had made sure to make the Yule tide special for their children. They had never been able to afford much of course. But it had been enough. And all of their children looked back at that time fondly. Lost in thought for a moment she had a far away look in her eyes that made Harry sure there was so much more to her he was yet to find out. He wanted to know everything.

"Are you ok?" he said to her.

She nodded as she put her quill down by her side, brushing his hand with hers. It was the gentlest touch but Harry felt as if she had passed something from herself to him.

"Yeah." she nodded smiling.

Come on Harry, he thought to himself.

Bite the bullet. He had to ask her and if he did not then he would regret it.

"There's the ball here at Christmas." he reminded her.

She nodded. She hadn't given it much thought. It was part of the tournament. and while she was sure that it would be a lot of fun she did doubt she was going to get the permission of her brothers to attend. She didn't want to get her hopes up. Not this time.

"Yeah." she repeated absently.

"Would you like to go?" Harry asked while he had the courage. "With me?"

She looked at him oddly. He was her best friend. And now he was asking her something which sounded to her like something you wouldn't ask a best friend. Round the castle she had heard girls giggling about who was going to ask them to the ball. But it seemed to her awfully grown up to go to the ball with someone. It seemed to her like some thing a mother and father might go to before they were married. When they were courting. She knew her parents had attended a few together. She had seen the pictures. Her mother had had the most beautiful dresses for balls. She remembered wanting ones like them when she was old enough to court. Which was she realized now. She was fifteen, after all.

But the question had been presented to her out the blue and so she nodded and said what came to her naturally.

"Ok then."

She it so quietly he wasn't sure he had heard right. But the look in her eyes told him he had. And so he smiled back at her. They were going to the ball.

"So it does seem our Cinderella is going to the ball." said Albus to his brother.

Aberforth grunted.

He regretted his answer to Harry now. He didn't know why he had said yes to him in the first place. He supposed he had been surprised and he hadn't really thought about it. And now his sister was off to the ball. Much to his annoyance he realized if he wanted to be with her

on Christmas day he was going to have to go as well. He could think of nothing less he'd like to do on Christmas day than go to a school Ball. What was wrong with staying at home eating dinner.

"Did I do the right thing for her allowing her to go?" he asked.

"I think you did, I think she needs to be with people her own age and it is obvious that Harry cares for her if she came to you to ask to take her. If something goes wrong then we are both going to be close on hand." Albus shrugged. He was thrilled for his sister.

"I know. It just feels odd her going with a boy some where!" He wondered if this was how his father would have felt he saw his little girl all grown up.

"She was going to fall in love some time." Albus shrugged. He had always known that they weren't going to be the only men she loved for ever. Apparently his brother had thought they would be.

When you looked past her illness she was a beautiful young women. Why shouldn't she be courted? Have fun and laugh with a lad her own age.

"Is she ever going to be able to have a proper relationship though? I love her but I am not so blind to her I cant see she isn't all there. Is she going to be able to cope with a boy liking her?"

It was a weird and awkward conversation for them to be having. When she had come in the summer it hadn't dawned on Aberforth that some one might Evert like her enough in that way. She had been ill. But she had changed in the days she had been at Hogwarts. She had matured.

The potion had changed everything though. And in her sane state he knew there brother was right. She was very much like every other girl. Why should she not fall in love?

But then he was probably blowing everything out of proportion. They were two teenagers going to a party together. That was all he told

himself. It was innocent. And when it was done they would still just be friends.

-

"Hey there he is the chip off the old block. That's my boy!" Harry heard as he walked down the empty corridor.

Apparently his godfather was behind him.

He turned to Sirius with a smile on his face. He was taking a girl to the ball. She had said yes. He felt like - like - a marauder.

"I'm proud of you boy." said Sirius wrapping an arm round his shoulders and kissing his forehead quickly.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I am sure you two are going to make a sweet couple." he teased.

"Shut up." he said to him playful.

"No seriously Harry I think the two of you are going to make each other happy."

"I don't know what you're on about we are going together as friends."

"Of course you are. That is why you asked her brother for permission to take her. God, Harry are you secretly planning on marrying the girl?"

-

Ariana looked out the window. The news that she and Harry were going to the ball together was spreading and she knew it. The oddest couple at Hogwarts. That was what they were.

Smiling she thought for the first time how much she loved being weird. As long as it was with him. It felt good to be together. Harry coming in to the common room looked at her.

"More snow today." he said to her.

"Yes I saw it. I was thinking as about going out to build a snow man in a bit." she said to him. "Do you want to come?" he nodded.

"Sounds like fun."

"Good."

Within fifteen minutes of her suggestion they were out in the ground building it together.

"Every one talking about the two us." Harry said to her.

"Yeah, well then what's new?" she shrugged.

Nothing he supposed. They were just two very odd friends who liked to do normal stuff together. If any one had a problem with that, well then at least it wasn't their problem. Not any more.

Ariana's dark hair fell in front of her eyes as she built with him and Harry fought the urge to brush it away.

"My god he has it bad." thought Sirius as he watched from his office. Love. Who would have thought it three months ago? He almost wished he had fallen for any other girl in the world. Not her. He wanted his godson to love one who would be able to properly return his feelings. That wasn't Ariana.

He had only ever seen one other man with such feelings for a woman in his eyes.

"He's how James was over Lily." he muttered again to himself. He had seen the same burning hope in James's eyes as he saw in Harry's when he looked at the Dumbledore girl. He was going to have to give him the talk soon he smirked to himself.

But not that day.

They were young, he thought to himself. Let them enjoy it. Whilst it lasts.

Chapter 29

Just a few days in to the holidays Ariana went in to Hogsmeade. Not with her brothers for once but with Hermione, Ginny and Luna. They had come with her to choose a dress robes. Some thing for the ball.

It felt weird going out with the girls but at the same time good. After they were going to get lunch at the Three Broomsticks. When she had told Aberforth he had called her a traitor which had made her laugh.

Going in to the robe shop she felt apprehensive.

"I have never chosen my own clothes before." she said to Hermione.

"well that's ok. We'll help you." she said gently guiding her in.

Ariana had never seen so many fine clothes in one room before she didn't know where to start. It seemed incredible to the other girls that someone their age had never even chosen a dress for themselves before. It was the little things like that which brought it home to Hermione how serious what had happened to her was and how much it had effected her life.

"What's colour?" she heard Hermione ask her.

"Red." she said to Hermione.

It was bight and her mother had always called it a Christmas colour so that was what she would wear.

Ariana felt that was the day she became one of the girls. She had been so far apart of them. Till then.

They picked out the red dresses for her and helped her choose the ones she liked. Then the pointed her in the direction of the fitting rooms.

It was only half way through this process Ariana realised how grown up she felt. Suddenly it wasn't as if she was a child. If only for that afternoon she was a girl bordering on young womanhood.

If her sanity left her that evening she would be happy for she had had one day of a complete normality. And yet even as she thought it she knew it wasn't true. When she eventually picked her dress she wanted to wear it for its purpose. She was going to the ball. And she was going to dance all night.

The dress Hermione and her settled on eventually was a full length crimson gown that cut off at the solids and had three quarters length sleeves.

"I think Harry is going to like it." Hermione said to her. Ariana failed to see the importance of that. As long as she liked it then what did it matter if he did.

The only one who didn't seem to thoroughly enjoy herself was Ginny for a reason unknown to Ariana, thought not to Hermione. She wanted to be in Ariana's place. She wanted to go to the ball with Harry.

Watching as the dark haired beauty spin in her dress she felt sadder. She would never know what she was doing. Not really.

Ginny would know the significance of going with Harry she thought to herself. She had loved him her whole life. Even before Ron had brought him home she was sure. And now this girl who had no real appreciation of what Harry had done had besotted him. It wasn't fair. Why couldn't be the girl he wanted?

-

"So you have your dress."

"Yes."

"So are you going to let me see it."

“No. You are going to have to wait till the ball.”

Harry laughed at Ariana’s teasing. He was looking forward to there night together. It was going to be good.

“Have you your dress robes?”

“Yes.”

They were walking about the grounds together. Arm in arm to keep the cold away.

“I cant wait. I think it is going to be a really good night.”

“I am sure we will.”

She sighed. It seemed so crazy. Everything did.

“My life has changed so much.”

“I know. But it is for the better right.” he asked.

She nodded. It most certainly was.

She couldn’t imagine what life would have been like for her had she not turned up. How much unhappier she would have been. And she would never have met Harry who she knew was the best friend she was ever going to make.

-

“Merry Christmas my sweetheart.”

“merry Christmas Aba.”

It was Christmas eve. The ball was tomorrow. Ariana couldn’t contain her excitement. Her brother was excited to. Their first Christmas together in years. He had forgotten what a truly happy Christmas was. But here was Ariana like a ghost back to remind him. She turned up at the pub by six as they had agreed. She was going to sleep over

the night so they had some time alone. Then she was going back to the castle for lunch with Albus.

Then she had the ball with her friends. It really was going to be a perfect Christmas.

But at that moment as her elder brother wrapped her in a bear hug she knew she was going no where. She was staying with him.

“Oh I cant believe we’re having Christmas together.” he said to her. He didn’t want to be so soft but he wanted her to know how much he had missed her about this time of year.

“I know. It is amazing. I can’t remember the last time we gad a truly great Christmas.” she said to him,

“well I promise you. This one will be.”

And by the end of the night it was already. Aberforth had got egg nog in for the two of them. Lighting the fire, it roared throughout the evening as they sat in the living room talking about what ha happened over the last three months. She found her brother thought her return nothing less than a miracle. And so did she.

Then they spoke about the years in between., there were still so many blanks for her with what her brother had been doing.

It turned out he had not been doing a lot. There was a hint of regret in his voice. He had wasted a lot of his life. Waiting for her.

Wasted? No he thought to himself. She had been worth it. That much he knew. But he wished he had had more in his life. And now hew as entering the winter of it as his sister came in to the spring of her years.

“This has been a long time coming baby sister.” he said to her.

“I know it has. What happened...” she said to him shaking her head. “the argument, I am glad it did in a way. “ she said and he looked at her for further explanation. “If it hadn’t then we would never have been reunited. And I would have been sick my whole life. There was

no potion to help me then.” she mourned. “You would have been looking after an invalid forever. Don’t you see it is better this way.” she asked.

He nodded. She was right. It was must better this way.

“I cant believe how much you have grown up.” he said to her.

“Mr neither. But life is good for us at the moment.”

For the first time in a century. I think we deserved bit of luck don’t you.” she nodded.

”Lets hope it stays this way.” he agreed.

“It will.” she said to him with a smile. “Right I am going to get my beauty sleep.”

“You need it.”

“Oi.” he said to him as they laughed. Getting up she walked over and gave him a kiss. “Night Night then Gramps.” she teased back.

He still had a smile on his face as she walked away in to her own room. It had been a good day. It almost seemed she was the girl she had been when she had been six. So happy and playful had she been that day...

-

“This is for you my dear.”

“What is it?”

“Open it up and find out.”

The box in Ariana’s hand was soft and velvet to touch. She looked at it with intense interest. Albus gift to her was unlike Aberforth’s, who had given her a new dress and two reading books.

Looking in side of the box she saw a necklace.

A single ruby pendent fell from it.

"I hoped it might come in handy tonight." he said to her. "I hoped you might be able to wear it to the ball."

She nodded.

"Of course I can - Albus its beautiful. I've never had anything like this before" she admitted.

It shocked her receiving such a gift. And it reminded her she was no longer a child. You wouldn't give a child such a fine gift.

"Maybe you can put it on for me now." she asked him

"Of course I can." he nodded taking it out its box. She held up her hair as he fastened the clip

"There. Its looks stunning on you." he said as she turned back. Her dark eyes were alive with warmth for him.

"My news resolution is to spend more time with you this year." he told her.

"Then I'll make it mine too."

Kissing her fore head he smiled. He would never attempt to buy her affection but as he felt her arms go around him, he was filled with love for the girl as she was for him.

The necklace had been a very good choice indeed.

-

Hermione and Ariana were in there dorm room. Preparation for the ball seemed as important to the other girls as the evening itself thought Ariana.

The Patel twins had been preparing it seemed all day by four o'clock when Ariana arrived. She had been seeing her brother most of the day and only now had the time to start getting ready come. She had three hours

Ginny was there too with Hermione as she came in.

"Come on Ariana." Hermione said to her as she sat on her bed. "You have a big night to get ready for."

Please Review!

Chapter 30

"Are you sure I look ok?" said Ariana as she twirled in the middle of there dorm room for Hermione. She was ready for the ball at last. Her chestnut brown hair had been put up into a sharp but stylish bun. She had her red dress on and Hermione had helped her make up her face up. She thought she looked as if she might have had she the opportunity to come out into society. Well, that was exactly what she was doing that evening. And she felt in her heart it was right. Everything which had happened to her over the last three months had been leading up to that moment.

"Yes." said Hermione as she stood inn her own blue gown in the dorm room. She had a smile on her face. "You look beautiful Ariana." The last three hours had passed for the girls in a endless round of wiping and trying on make up, discussing their dates and washing their hair. Ariana had truly become one of the girls that day she thought to herself. "You are. Harry is going to be stunned by you."

The very thought made her cheek blush. She had always though on the run up to there night of it as a friendship thing. And yet now the opportunity of a real romance seemed to be hitting the fifteen year old. And she liked the thought of it. It didn't scare her. It excited her. A real romance...

Please let tonight go ok.

"And I am sure Viktor is going to be besotted by you." she said to her. Hermione looked breath taking in her blue dress with her hair smoothed back.

"Right. Then lets go." she said. The two girls took each others hands and walked down the stairs. Side by side, the two girls made their way through the common room and out in to the castle.

"Where are you meeting Harry?"

"Just out side of the hall." she said to her.

"That's where I am meeting Viktor."

“Come on then.”

The walk down felt a dream to Ariana. This was her night. She could feel it.

Harry was waiting for her as he said he would be and he was the first thing she saw as she looked down the stairs. He looked quite handsome in his black dress robes. She noted he had tried to do something with his unruly hair. Something on a normal day she never would have seen. As she begun her descent down the stairs he looked up at her. And he thought his heart would burst. It literally hurt at the sight of her.

It was then he knew. At that moment he understood.

I am and forever will be in love with Miss Ariana Dumbledore...

As she got to the bottom of the stairs no words were necessary. She smiled at him and took his arm. This was them. They were a team.

And not just for the evening.

“You look pretty.” he said to her.

Beautiful and stunning seemed over stated words. Words to adult for them. Pretty seemed some how just right in his head.

“Thank you.” She said blushing for the second time that night.

They walked in to the hall together. They had to get dance with the other champions to open the ball but then the night was their's.

He looked about the room. And she felt like a different person. Not because of the way she looked. But because of the way others looked at her.

-

Aberforth and Albus Dumbledore stood side by side in the great hall. They were both nervous for their sister. There was so much that might go wrong for her and both knew how much she wanted the evening to go well. They watched as the young couples poured in to the hall. The Malfoy boy came in with Parkinson, Ginny and Neville came in side by side.

And behind Hermione and Viktor came Harry and a girl Aberforth thought for a minute was not his sister, anger rose in him till the startling realization came to him that it was indeed Ariana.

She was so beautiful. And she had the look of their mother about her. He had never seen it before but she looked just like Kendra. Her brown hair had been put up in to a bun, and her red dress set alight her pale skin.

He also could not fail to miss the pride in Harry's face as he walked in with her. He was with the most beautiful girl in the room, in both their opinions. They were both obviously nervous about the dance, but they were nervous together. From that day on Aberforth knew he would have to share his sister even more.

"Are you ready to dance Ariana." Harry asked her.

"Indeed I am!" she said to him.

McGonagall called them over to her. And they fell in step behind Hermione and Viktor as they had been since they had entered the hall.

"Don't worry about every one watching us," he told her,

"I won't." she smiled, to her there was no one in the room but them.

Though it was nerve wrecking the dance went surprisingly well, and the pair got through it.

After the initial dance every one joined in. She held on to Harry's hand as they jumped about with every one else, the formal dancing left behind them as they let go and have fun. It was at that moment

she realized she had not even looked for her brother since she had been in the hall. She had seen Albus when he had said his speech to open the evening but was yet to speak to either him or Aberforth. She just wanted to be Harry that night. No one else.

Also, it seemed Harry didn't want to let her out of his sight for long enough for her to see her brothers.

After they had danced, they got drinks and a bit of food and then they headed back to the dance floor as the Weird Sisters came on to perform. She found modern music so odd still. She still far preferred the classical music Percival had enjoyed.

"Are you having a good time?" Harry asked her.

"I am having the time of my life."

It was true. She had never done anything like this before. She didn't know if she would again. She was living for the day.

He took her hand and before he knew what he had done he had raised it to his lips and kissed it. It was such a sincere gesture.

His expression was startled but as he looked in to her eyes she was not at all. She seemed to have enjoyed the sensation of his lips grazing her hand.

"I really like you Ariana." he admitted to her. It seemed a stupid thing to say but the under current of what he meant got through to her.

"I like you too."

The music had been so loud that no one but them had heard their exchange. It was secret.

A warmth through Ariana's veins that night. It felt as if someone had covered her with a blanket or it she was a cold night and she was by a fire. It was that loving warmth that made her feel protected and safe.

The song ended, so they slipped off the dance floor. Sitting down, the pair agreed it was time for another drink and Harry went to get them both one.

"You look as if you are having a good time my sweetheart." she heard later that evening. Looking up with a smile on her face she saw Aberforth coming toward her.

"I am. Its been brilliant." she said to him as he sat by her side and wrapped an arm about her. It was the first time it seemed to him that Potter had given his sister five minutes to breath. While he was glad the lad was treaying her right, he would rather like to spend time with her himself.

"So what do you think girl? Do you have time for a Christmas time dance with your big brother?"

"Of course I do."

Aberforth who had made a point of not dancing for most of the evening proceeded to lead his little sister to the dance floor.

"Have you had a good time?"

"I have now Ariana," he said as the song begun and he started dancing with her.

-

"I really did that didn't I? I danced all night with my brother and Harry, and nothing happened to me. I coped didn't I?"

"Yes you did." Hermione said.

It was early the next morning and the girls were still in bed, but had drawn back there curtains so they might see each other and talk.

"It was wonderful. I have never had so much fun in my life before." she told her.

Hermione nodded. She had seen her friend the night before. She had been young, beautiful and carefree.

“I know. Me neither!” she agreed. Viktor had been brilliant company. She had really enjoyed it. He was useful for more than just Quidditch. He could dance too.

“I wish we could do it all over again.” Ariana sighed happily.

It had been a wonderful Christmas day.

The girls lay in silence for a minute. Ariana averted her eyes to the windows where snow was still heavily falling. It was so stunning.

If she could stay in that moment forever, then she would. But then again, she would never see Harry again. And that wouldn't do. Not now.

Her feelings for her friend had been so changed by the previous night. Irreversibly so. He wasn't her friend any more. He was so much more than her friend. Neither was he her boyfriend. That didn't do him justice.

It was more than courtship. It was more than friendship.

It was....love. Not that she would ever put it to herself that way. At least not yet.

The two girls looked at each other and perhaps it was the silent understanding of what had happened to them both the night before but they began to laugh. The laugh that came only when some one was deliriously happy. And when they knew in their heart of hearts, even if something bad were to happen in the future nothing could take that night they had just had away.

Chapter 31

"You know I don't think I am ready for the holidays to be over yet. I have had such a good time." said Ariana. Her and Harry were in the common room. The two of them had cuddled up on the sofa. It was boxing day still and they were both tired after the night before. Being the middle of the day they pretty much had the common room to themselves.

"Me neither. Last night was so much fun." he muttered. He had shut his eyes; her head was on his chest. She had wrapped her fingers about his T shirt and he had his hand on her hip. They had never shared such intimacy before.

"The best night of my life. I really enjoyed myself. I felt that I was untouchable. I also proved to my brothers that I am actually half way sane."

"You are. You're completely sane." he said wanting to believe it was true. He remembered when things had gone wrong the night the other schools had arrived. She was so fragile. It was as if anything could break her. He had never felt such a need to protect some one. He was absolutely terrified of losing her. Before that year he had never known that feeling. Sirius and she had taught him to feel. He had a family about him now. He didn't ever want to be alone again.

"I wish I was." she shrugged.

"In my eyes you are." he told her. A smile spread across her face. Maybe he was right.

"You make everything seem ok." she said to him.

"It is. Why do you always doubt yourself?" he asked her.

She shrugged. "Because with me everything does always seem to go wrong." she sighed, shutting her eyes. Taking up her hand he laced his fingers through hers.

“Me too. But we have had a bit of luck. For gods sake let’s enjoy it.” he said to her and she nodded.

She didn’t want too break the moment and so she stayed silent. She laid there in peace. A perfect moment of peace for them both. There was so much going on. Her lessons, the tri wizard tournament. Their lives were never going to be normal. But they could still be happy.

-

“What are you doing for news years eve?” asked Hermione. She was in the library with Ariana. The girls had decided it was a good idea to try and get a bit of work done before term begun and so Hermione had dragged Ariana and Harry apart for the hour. He hadn’t minded though. He, Ron and the Weasley twins had gone down to the Quidditch pitch for the hour.

“I don’t know, but I think I wanna stay here with you guys. I feel so horrible. I feel as if I should go home to the pub for It.” she said to her friend. She knew she had not been the best sister lately. She hadn’t spent the majority of her free time with Harry. The news depths of their relationship excited her and she wanted to explore them, but not at the cost of her relationship with Aberforth.

“Don’t. Aberforth wont mind.” Hermione said encouragingly.

“Don’t you think?”

“No. I think he is going to understand that you want to be with your mates.” she said as she wrote her essay.

“Maybe. I hope so.”

“Besides the twins are putting it about that there is going to be a party in the common room for it.” she said.

“I don’t want to miss that. I’ll speak to Aberforth. Your right. I am sure he is going to understand.”

-

Aberforth knew he was a selfish old fool at times and he knew he was set in his ways when it came to his little sister. When they had been young it had been just them. Aberforth and Ariana against the world. That had been how he liked it, he dare say. He enjoyed the feeling of being special to her. Yet he felt the Potter boy and his friends were taking her away from him. He was acting he knew like such a child. But he didn't want to let her go.

"I can come and see you on New Years day," she said smiling up at him, having just told him about the party in the common room. The right thing was to let her go he knew. She was a teenager, and she was determined to get a social life obviously. If he didn't live so close to the school then none of this would even be an issue. She would be like all of the other Gryffindors in her house. She was a student. And she wanted to live the life of a Hogwarts student. He had agreed to let her go to school. Now they had to take all that came with it.

"Alright then sweetheart. That's sounds good." He felt sick as he said those words. He had wanted her with him, but then there was a price for everything. Even love. he knew he had to lie to himself as well as her if he wasn't going to say no to her.

"You're the best Aberforth." she said to him diving in to his arms for a hug before she left the pub to go back up to the school. She was going to see in the next year with all her friends.

And it was going to be great fun.

She felt more settled than she had done for years and happier too. It was days like those that made her glad to be alive.

-

Ariana and Harry threw themselves into the party on New Years Eve. They were there with all there friends but more importantly they were together. And that was the way it was going to stay.

Ron and Hermione sat down together with Ginny and Neville on the sofa while Ariana and Harry sat on one of the larger arm chairs together.

This had been what she was missing she thought to herself. All that time when she had been sick she had been missing out on the best things in life. Having a real set of friends about her who going to be there for her no matter what. She also had a family who she adored.

And she was well enough to show them that now. The last three months had been what constituted the year for her and they had been great. She had had her down times but then again hadn't they all.

The only thing that really mattered was that she was back now. The next year was going to be as good as this one had been.

"Right are you lot ready it is time for the count down?" said Fred, getting up on the table so he could see the hole of the common room.

"10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1!"

"Happy new year," said Harry to her as he slid his arm about her waist.

"You too." she said to him as they drew together and for a moment there lips collided.

It was only for a second, but it was their first kiss.

Neither had ever had such a happy new year before.

Chapter 24

“Well if it isn’t our very own Romeo!”

It wasn’t like Hermione to part take in teasing whether it was light hearted or not but Sirius, her and Ron seemed not to be able to help it when they saw Harry.

He had a stupid grin on his face.

“Watch it Hermione.” he smiled.

“Oh wow that was threaten.” said Sirius rolling his eyes.

“Do I take it this new found happiness is down to our miss Ariana.”

Again with the stupid grin.

Sirius shook his head. He had never seen the boy his happy and it was good to do so. He just wondered how long it was going to last. With the two of them there was always something going wrong and he dearly loved them both. Harry was his god son and yet with out Ariana he wouldn’t be there for him. She had filled the cell in Azkaban which held Peter.

He just hoped there happiness was real.

Looking at Harry it was.

“You know you don’t want the wind to blow or your face is going to stay that way.”

“I don t know if I care if it does.” he said to him.

Sirius laughed fondly.

“Do you want to come in and get a cuppa tea you three. I can put the kettle on.”

The three nods told him that was a very good idea. One after the other they retreated to the safety of Sirius's apartment at Hogwarts.

It was a real bachelor pad thought Hermione. It was his home. Perhaps the first real one he had ever had.

He had never been happy when he had been at home with his family as a kid. Then he had told them how he had gone to the {Potters. He had got this look in his eyes that told her he had really loved it there. But it had been almost too perfect for him. After so much unhappiness as a child she had got the vibe he had never really settle down with James and his parents, no matter how much he had loved it. Yet he had made this place his own.

The black leather sofas were surprisingly stylish, and the Gryffindor red walls revealed how much affection he still had for his old house.

Harry collapsed in not the sofa. When he was not in class or with Ariana it was here he spent much of his time. His godfather to him was the first adult apart from Hagrid he felt he could turn to no matter what the problem was. Especially since the beginning of the tournament. They still didn't know who had put his name in that goblet. He really wanted to know who had put all this grief on his shoulders. This should have been the best year he had yet had at Hogwarts.

But the tournament was wrecking it for him.

Yet still he had a family about him. People who he loved and who loved him in return. That was something he was so grateful for, he could not put it into words he thought as he looked into the fire that warmed the room his godfather lived in.

When he was done making the tea, Sirius came into the living room and ruffled his god sons hair. It was good to be home indeed.

-

"I have feed the goats." said Ariana as she came into the pub. Aberforth looked up and smiled at her. Good as her word she had come to see him on New Years day.

"Thanks sis." he said to her though he knew she enjoyed it.

"Can I get a butter beer barmen?" she teased as she took up one of the stools.

He nodded and indulgently got her one.

"So, did you make a new years resolution." he asked her.

"Yeah. To try and be a better sister to you and Albus, and to try and stop giving you so many head aches." she said to him as if it was obvious.

"I like the sound of that."

"Some how I thought you might." she said to him. "and what about you. What's yours?"

"To try and give you some more freedom. I know it isn't easy me being your over bearing big brother." he shrugged.

"Not all the time, but at others I like it."

"I thought that I was smothering you too much."

"No your not." she said to him.

"You sure?" he said as he came round the bar.

She nodded.

"Aba I may be growing up but I still really need you."

That was all he had needed to hear. Lately she had so been growing apart from him he felt. Cupping her face he looked at her and stroked her face.

"My baby sister. So beautiful."

She beamed and leaned in to him inhaling him. "Don't leave me alone. Don't back off. Don't ever leave me."

"Wild horses aren't going to drag me away. You should know that by now." he muttered.

She nodded and shut her eyes.

"I am sorry I didn't come for New Years."

"It's ok." he said to her.

-

The day passed and the New Year brought with it the new term. Lessons resumed in the castle.

Ariana found herself back in the potions dungeon looking out the top of the window. The snow had turned to rain, pouring down in miserable showers which did nothing to keep people's spirits up after the joys of the holiday. In the common room she had heard two of the first year muggle borns swapping stories of how wonderful it had been to go home. They were obviously homesick as they got to grips with their first year.

"Miss Ariana are you going to join us today?" she heard Snape say to her.

She hadn't even noticed him coming to her side.

"Yes. Sorry professor." she said feeling embarrassed.

"If you are going to catch up with your fourth year friends, first you must keep up with your first year class mates."

She nodded.

Ariana found herself still cringing from the incident when she met up with Harry for lunch.

"Don't you worry about that miserable old git." he said as they walked in to the hall hand in hand.

"It's easy for you to say. I don't want them to think I am not trying."

"No one could think that," he said to her.

"Really."

"Yes." he said as they sat down at the table.

"Harry is right Ariana. Snape has a go at every one, it is his hobby." said Ron to her.

Neville nodded at his comment.

"We're right,." he said as he looked at her doubtful face.

"Ari just concentrate next lesson. You'll be fine." Hermione chipped in and she nodded.

-

"Professor Snape was talking to me today."

"Oh."

Reading and writing had commenced. Albus was glad. He had been busy over the holidays and he had barely touched base with his sister.

He had watched her from afar though and he thought she had handle the holidays splendidly. She had really thrown herself in to the celebrations. She had her own group of friends now. She was not simply the new girl of his sister any more.

She had her own identity about the school.

“He told me about how hard you were working in class today.”

“Sarcasm I take it Al.” she asked.

He gave her ‘the’ look.

“Oh I know I know. I am just finding it weird being back in class after so long having fun.” she said to him.

His eyes twinkled behind his spectacles.

“My dear I am teasing you.” he informed her.

“Your kidding.” she laughed.

Laughter...her laughter... the sweetest sound though Albus to himself.

“You had a great Christmas?”

“Nearly the best.” she said to him.

“Why wasn’t it the very best?”

“Al, I understand there dead. But it doesn’t mean I don’t think about mama and papa. I miss them still....wish they could have been there.”

Chapter 33

Ariana and Harry left the castle together. With the weekend coming with the next task tomorrow the two had decided they needed five minutes alone, especially considering she was going back to the pub the next day as well.

"You know I want to be there with you." She said to him. She honestly felt awfully that she had to leave even if it was not her choice but her brothers. She just felt so guilty.

"I know you do but you know what happened last time. We can meet up after."

"I want to be there."

"But I want to keep you safe and on the right side of your brothers." said Harry. It was important for him to keep their trust where it came to her now he had gained it. It made all their lives so much easier and simpler.

"I can wrap the two of them round my fingers if you want me too." she giggled back at him.

"No don't be bad." he laughed as they walked down to the lake holding hands.

"I want to be there with you though." she said. It was something she felt strongly about he knew. But it just couldn't be.

"And I know you are." Harry said to her, kissing her cheek.

"This task is going to be a hard one for you though." If she could help him anyway possible then she wanted too.

"It's a task of course it is going to be hard it is designed that way."

"But."

"No Ariana. We are not going to have a repeat of last time."

"And when did you get so mature pray tell." she asked.

Shrugging, Harry and Ariana continued on there walk. It was a cold day but the sun was high in a clear blue sky. The last of the snow was fading.

What a magical winter it had been. but with spring new tidings come.

"I am going to be so much happier when all this is over. When I know you are going to be safe."

"Then that's makes two of us sweetheart." Harry said to her turning to look at her as they slowed down.

Coming to a complete stop he put his fingers sunder her chin and raise it up so he could kiss her.

"Next year is going to be better than this one." he said to her

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"Headmaster is every thing ok?" asked Sirius.

He had been in with Dumbledore for a while and the teacher did not seem to be his head.

Albus nodded carefully but it was obvious there was something on his mind.

The truth was that the ministry was despite there assurances at the beginning of the year were starting to ask awkward questions about his sister. How she had come to bee here? And why they were not working on sending her back?

But the truth was sending her back to there was the worst thing for her. He knew what was waiting for her . He was. And no way was he ready for the responsibility. No it was best she stayed put where her brothers were really able to look after her.

“Ariana is getting on well here wouldn’t you say?” he had to hear it from some one out side of there family. It was not like the head master. To need so much reassurance but then he didn’t normally have her to think about. Normal he sighed. When had things ever been normal for Albus Dumbledore. And what was the definition of normal.

“Yeah of course she is she is doing better and better.” Sirius said joyfully. “not only that but she is making Harry happier than I have ever seen him. The last six months have been the best time of both their lives.”

Dumbledore nodded. Maybe he was right.

“Why do you say that?”

“I am not used to raising a child. Overseeing them all at school it something I can do, but bringing one up.”

“That makes two of us. After all I cant say I have really had any experience of all this.”

“So what if we get it wrong. What if I get it wrong again.”

“I don’t think we can think like that.”

Dumbledore fell silent. If he was getting this wrong...

Was he ever going to stop thinking like this?

All that mattered was he protected her from outsiders. People who wanted to take her away.

It was funny he thought how the things that had obsessed them so long ago. His mother had been terrified someone was going to rob them of her.

That fear hadn't gone.

He had begun to wonder if it was ever going to go when it came to his sister. He never knew what was going to come next with her and so he could never really let go of her. Not if she was going to need him.

"Come on then you." said Aberforth. He had come to the school gates to pick his sister up. It was the day of the second task. They had decided she would return with him to the pub. It was the best place for her while it was all going on.

Harry despite knowing he had to get down to the lake to do whatever was waiting for him, he had to had gone to see her off.

"You are going to do great. I know you will." she said ignoring what Aberforth had said and knowing they had to say good bye, he backed off for just a moment. This was their moment before he went off to face what was ahead. It felt as if they were parting for a week, when in reality she was most likely just going to be gone till the morning or not even that long.

"Are you going to be back tonight?" he asked her.

"I don't know. Depends what my brother has planned. But if I am not then you'll see me in the morning ok?"

Even Aberforth had to say it was almost touching how the two were always there to support one another and back the other up. The bond that was there between them obviously ran deep now.

Harry nodded and smiled.

"I love you Ari." he whispered to her and she nodded.

"I love you too."

Again he found himself wishing more than anything it was going to be her watching him that day as he went in to the next task but they both knew it just couldn't be.

"Ariana come along."

She nodded left and followed behind her brother, leaving Harry to the task.

-

Sirius and Harry stood side by side the lake. The task was over and Harry had won when he had saved his god father from the creatures in the lake.

Looking down at what he had just done, he felt a smile spread across his face because he knew his god father was smiling too.

Harry had done it, thought Sirius to himself and he was holding his own in the competition.

The youngest competitive to.

"If only James could see your right now. He would be the proudest father in the world."

Harry nodded.

That was what he had needed to hear. That if he could be then his father would indeed be there for him.

Having Sirius about had made him come to terms with how much he had needed a dad and how much he had been denied. His god father was all the only sort of parent he had ever had and now he had a central part in his life. He was the one he went to when he was in trouble and he was the one who could give him advice.

There was nothing he would ever keep from his god father. He found it so easy and natural to talk to him and turn to him.

They were more than god father and son, or parent and kid. They were mates as well. That was what was so great about their relationship.

Over the past six months the turn around in Harry's life had been phenomenal. And it was all for the better.

Harry looked forward to every new day.

And he had every reason to do so.

Chapter 34

Since the second task came and went the time seemed to quicker and Harry knew he was going to have to start restricting the time he spent with Ariana.

There was a very simple reason for that.

The exams were lurking just about the corner.

All the work she had put in that year had to count for something didn't it? She had made such great progress. He knew it was only a little at a time but it was progress none the less. She had put a lot of effort into where she had got too. And she was a Dumbledore. A young powerful witch with the rest of her life ahead of her.

She had to pass into her second year in his eyes.

There was no other option.

And so he tried to keep her out of his problems as much as he could. He knew he should be honest with her. Her quirky ways were just what he needed to help him at times. What she saw gave him a different perspective and helped him so much. But she had to focus on herself. And helping herself. He hadn't even told her about the egg.

He was not going to tell her all the trouble he was having getting ready for the third task.

That wouldn't be fair.

The tasks he was going to face were just as hard as the exams were going to be for her.

So he cooled things with her so she went home to Aberforth at the weekends and so that she went to find Albus when she needed help studying, or even Sirius.

He didn't realise he was hurting her in the process though.

After being so close to him for so long she felt as if they had become suddenly so estranged from each other.

It was weird.

Going down to the goat pen on her break from studying, she sighed, it wasn't fair. But then life rarely was.

"What a heavy heart you look as if you have today precious." Aba said as he came down to watch her.

She tried to give him a smiled.

It was no good.

"I am just stressing." she shrugged to him. It would be too weird to tell him about Harry she thought to herself. She would tell Hermione tomorrow though. She would understand more than her brother.

"Don't work yourself up sweetheart, stay calm there not worth getting upset over."

"But they are everything I have been working for this past year."

"I know they are but they are not going to be the be all and end all for you. If you don't get them then it is going to be the end of the world."

He hadn't got his exams. But by the time he was ready to pass out of Hogwarts they just had not seemed what was important any longer. His family were.

And they had all been gone from him. He had missed them so much that he had stopped caring about everything else.

She nodded, understanding why he said what he said. But the feeling she had to get her exams only intensified. She wasn't in the same situation as he had been.

Albus was the one she really wanted to do proud. Over the pass months in their lessons together she felt she had built a new

relationship with her eldest brother. She didn't want that to be taken from her now. With Aberforth it was different. He was sturdy and safe and reliable. She knew he was always going to be proud of her if she had done her best. With Albus it was different. She knew he had reached great heights and she wanted to match him in some ways. The old siblings rivalries from their youth weren't always gone.

Sitting at the bar later on she tried as hard as she could to recall her early child good when she had been sane and they had all been together and more than that they had happy.

She tried to picture what had once been so familiar to her. But it just was not there any more.

She feared her new life had pushed her old one out. A life of learning new things had destroyed what had once been so strong and so present in her life.

"I am going to go up to bed," she said to her brother. She to get some sleep.

Then she would feel better by the morning.

-

"I don't know how you do it," Ariana said to Harry as they sat out by the lake together.

"What?"

"Study and get ready for the third task," he said and he gave her a soft smile as she praised him. "You know, I know you are going to win this tournament. You are already champion to me though," she said to him.

Closing his book he smiled and crawled over to her on a smile on his face. She always made him feel so much better.

"I am sorry if I have been cold with you lately because of it." he said to her acknowledging there had been a shift in their relationship. "There is just so much going on all of the time now."

"Don't even worry about it. Its like you said. Next year, when we are both under less pressure things are going to be better. We are going to have so much more time for each other."

She was right. And he knew it. He had said it himself. When she had got through her first year at Hogwarts. When he had finished the trail. Things were going to be easier. And they were not going to end, they were only just going to get going. Things were going to intensify for them. Their love.

"Ariana?"

"Mmm?"

"Kiss me."

Cupping his face she pulled him closer. A few months ago the physical side of their relationship would have terrified her. But he had taught her how to love another in a new way. With kissing and touching. It wasn't horrible. It was loving and compassionate.

"I adore you. You know that, don't you?" she said to him and he nodded.

I adore you.

What other girl in the world would say that to him? The times she was born - he knew she was scared of forgetting them. But subconsciously they were written all over her.

He nodded. "And I you."

When the last task was over things were going to be so good, he told himself. Better than they had ever been.

“Things are going to be so much easier for us. So soon...” she nodded. “We just have to wait a little while.”

The long wait for their troubles to be over was soon to be over

But already when they were alone together seemed so much easier. Simpler. When he was with her he didn't have to think about crouch or Bagman. He didn't have to think about the articles that were in the papers about Hermione and Krum. He didn't have to think about Ron, or Neville, or anything he didn't want too.

It was just them. And they were alone. Their mutual understanding made things uniquely easy with her. He didn't want that to end.

Harry found his mind turning to the summer. He and Sirius were going to be at Hogwarts. Ariana was no doubt going to alternate between the school and the pub as she always did. However, they were going to have no classes what so ever to get in the way of things. It was going to be wonderful.

Life before Ariana and Sirius had fading away in to a bad dream. Life had never seemed so wonderful.

It was at that moment, Harry should have realised it was the calm before the storm. But he didn't.

An: Chapter 29 is in place properly now. (Accidentally posted 19 twice! Opps! Thanks to the-dreamer4 for pointing that out).

Anyway, merry Christmas every one! Hope your enjoying the story.

Please review!

Chapter 35

The third task was upon them. By that tomorrow night the tournament would be over. Harry sat in the common room looking in to the fire. He wondered if he could actually do this.

He had been practising all week his charms and his spells. Ron, Hermione and especially Sirius had all been great with him and had helped him no end. But there was always going to be that seed of self doubt he thought to himself. He was the youngest champion. He was not ready for this he thought to himself. He wished he had just had a normal year more than anything else. Why was it just him who had to have a huge drama every year? By his side he felt a presence come to him and kiss the top of his arm.

"I thought you'd gone." he said to her. It was his Ariana.

"I convinced Aberforth to get me in the morning." she said to him.

He nodded, and he was glad of it.

"How did potions go?" he said.

She had sat her last exam that day. She had worked as hard as she could for them he knew. She had put her heart and soul into every one. Whatever she got he was going to be so proud of her. He knew she was so worried over her results. She had come in shaking after she had sat her transfiguration exam.

She shrugged.

"It doesn't matter. All that matters is you get through tomorrow. You're ready aren't you?" she asked and he nodded.

She rose her hand to his neck and begun caressing it. Slowly her hand worked round to his cheek and turned his face to his. She kiss him before sinking into his arms and snuggling in to him..

"Yes." he nodded. He was ready.

"I'll be waiting at the finish for you." she said to him. "I'm not going tomorrow. And nothing you can say to me can make me go to my brother."

She had a fresh determination in her voice he didn't think he had ever heard and he knew it was pointless to argue.

Harry wasn't sure how long he sat there, holding his girl close. But all he knew was that had been what he had needed. When he had needed her the most she had been there. He would always remember that.

-

"Why are you being like this? Sister please come home with me." said Aberforth to her. They were by the gates. Gates she usually walked so willingly thought with him but that day she refused too.

"I have walked away from this school twice before when he has needed me but this is the last task. And I love him. I know you think this is a school girl thing but it isn't. I love him. And I can't walk away today." She was a passionate young girl and there was no denying it.

"And what if something happens." He knew in his heart that this argument was not going to work in same way it had in her first term. Her illness had stopped hurting and scaring her. She wasn't going to let it rule her anymore. It had hhad enough of her life. She had wasted nine years.

She was never going to get them back.

"I am ok. I'm not sick any more. I am never going to be normal and I am never going to stop struggling with my work and I know for a fact things are never going to be easy for me but I am ok. I am going to that task. . Come with me if you want to . Let it be like the Yule Ball. But I am not leaving him. Not today." Her heart as ever he believed was in the right place. She wanted to do the right thing.

She had made her mind up the previous evening and he didn't think he had ever seen her so determined. He didn't think there was much

he could say that was going to change her mind and so he took the only path of action he could.

“Before you go into the task arena you are to wait for me to come in with you, do you understand?” he asked and she nodded.

“I will. I promise.” Her eyes were aglow with love. For once he had to accept it was not for him. Turning, she ran back into the castle to tell Harry she was staying.

-

Since she had been in the future Ariana had heard little of the Dark Lord. She remembered when Harry had returned from the Quidditch World Cup that something had gone on there vaguely. But they hadn't really spoken about it. Any of it, it just hadn't had an impact on their relationship.

But she began to realise as she sat at Harry's bedside that it was going to start affecting them. In a big way.

How had they ended up here? The task had meant to be a good thing. It was meant to be his chance to shine and then they were meant to end up happily. And it had ended up with him sick. And Voldemort back.

Taking his hand in hers she sighed. She loved him. So much.

Hermione, Ron, Mrs Weasley, the twins, Sirius and Aberforth were all there with her and Albus. His family were about him he realised.

He had a family and they were not about to abandon him.

But Cedric. He was dead. He was dead and he had done nothing wrong.

“I saw him die.” he said to Ariana and she nodded. She hadn't seen the body. Aberforth had rushed her away. He hadn't wanted her to see it.

She had screamed at him though. She was there for Harry and she was not going to leave him now. Nothing could make her turn from him.

"I know you did but that does not mean his death was your fault." she tried to soothe him.

"He's back."

"Yes. And everything is about to change." she nodded.

There was no use pretending any different.

He looked at her gratefully. As ever she had cut out the crap and she was not going to lie to him.

"Go to sleep Harry." Sirius advised as he felt the tears well up in his eyes. He was back. This couldn't be. Not again...not so soon, he didn't think he could go through it again. He didn't have it left in his heart too.

He had lost his best friends last time about. He couldn't lost his godson this time around. Harry was the best thing he had in his life, the very best thing which had ever happened to him. The year he had spent with the kids at Hogwarts had been so full of hope. It had been all about looking to the future. But the past had come back to haunt him in a way he had neither expected or wanted it too.

He had to get in contact with Remus. The Order had to reform. There was so much to do but his head was with Lily and James, the past, that was where his heart was. It was where he still wanted to be. With James at his side. He had felt safe last time because he had had his brother there for him. When they had fought they had fought together. And they had been unstoppable. But this time it was his job to protect others while no one was there watching his back.

All he could see was Harry and Ariana though. Her hand in his. Looking into each others eyes desperately.

Lily and James weren't gone. They were right there.

“Go to sleep,” she nodded in agreement. He had told Dumbledore everything that had gone on. Sirius had heard everything. He could rest now.

He had had his dreamless sleep potion..

“Stay with me tonight.”

“Wild hippogriffs couldn’t pull me away.” she nodded. “I’ll be right by your side.”

She wasn’t going any where. Not for anyone.

-

“God Albus why is this happening now? When the two of them were going to just have a chance to be happy with all this coming to a close.” Aberforth asked.

He and Albus were in his office. The elder of the two brothers knew who his real allies were. If the chips were down then they were going to be there for one another. A new united had been formed between them. All of them knew it was not the time for disharmony.

“I don’t know. And we don’t have time to ask questions at the gods right now.” he said to him. “I need you to help me reform the Order.”

Aberforth nodded.

“Go to the old guard, ask them to rejoin. Only the loyal.” he nodded.

“You know I will.” he said as he stood up and got ready to go.

Albus looked at him with admiration. For all the trouble that had been between the two of them he was still fighting for him, and willing to help him when things went wrong.

“Thank you brother.”

Aberforth nodded and went on his way. The Order didn't have time on their side. They had to move quickly.

He had something to fight for this time round he thought to himself.

He had to protect his sister.

"Check on Ari some time tonight." he asked. She wasn't the one important in all of this he knew. No that was Harry. But she was the only thing important to him.

"Of course I will." he nodded.

It was three before he got down there but when he did he found she was still there as she said she would be but she was the only one who was. Sirius had headed off to tell Remus, assorted Weasley's and Hermione had all nodded off.

When she saw her brother enter though she went to wear he was standing a few beds down. They didn't want to disturb the others.

"Things are about to get a lot darker sister." he said and she nodded. She knew this in her heart. But him saying it. Albus, who knew everything made it real to her.

"I am ready for this."

"No darling, none of us are. Don't be foolish. You weren't here last time. You don't know what's going to happen," he said to her in a moment of weakness. "People died, Harry's parents..." he sighed as he looked at the bed.

"And people will die this time." she nodded. "is that what your saying brother?" He confirmed it with a nod.

Harry, Albus, Aberforth, Sirius.

He had four very easy ways to break her heart. This, Dark Lord, whoever he was she begun to understand had the ability to take everything from her. And then who was she going to turn too? Who

was going to look after her? And who was going to look out for them if she was gone. The siblings found there hands joined together. This was in fellowship.

"You have courage in your heart." he said to her. "You don't know how much little sisters. But you will find out in the days to come."

"I wish I had no need of it." she replied.

"And I wish you didn't either my dear. But sometimes we have no choice. We must accept fate and face it head on."

"As you have been doing your whole life."

"As we both have." he said stroking her cheek.

"Stay with me. Brother I need you." she said. She couldn't lose him.

"I will be with you forever. Your imprinted on my heart as well as my skin. We're in each other sister." It was then as much as any time she understood that they were never really apart. They were siblings. She felt a hand on her shoulder. They were together always her and Albus. In the same way Percival and Kendra were always with them.

She nodded. And then he turned.

Chapter 36

The Hogwarts Express was leaving the next day and a disappointed Harry Potter knew he was going to be on it. He couldn't believe it. Just when you think things can't actually get any worse than they already are, they do.

Ariana sat on his bed as he packed up. She wasn't going to be with him on the train, and she wished he didn't have to go. Or she actually even wished she was going to get on the train with him. Just for them to be together. That was all she wanted. He needed her more than he ever had before.

The last week had passed for them both in a bit of a haze as they tried to make sense of the third task. Everything had gone so wrong.

A life had been lost and the whole school felt it, it seemed. Not only those who had been dear to him like Cho Chang. Ariana felt so sorry for her. It could have just as easily been Harry who had not come back from the grave yard though and had she had a choice she knew she would not have saved the poor Hufflepuff for her own selfish reasons. She would have chosen Harry every time

Albus had spent a lot of time with the two orphans though, mainly because they were both struggling to make head or tail of what had happened to Harry. He was also clinging on to his friends, Sirius and Ariana as if they were his life lines or the only things that were connecting him to his reality.

It was a terrible thing for one so young to go through. To see a life taken. And then to have to duel...

That had been the moment he had spoken most to his girlfriend about though. The moment when he had seen his parents emerge to him. For the two orphans any sign of their parents was such an incredible thing.

For a moment in that night Harry had had some good happen to him she thought to herself. Lily and James had come back to him. And he knew he was loved by them now.

Not that he hadn't before but it had confirmed every thing he believed about his parents.

Then he had had to face the fall out. She knew he had shown more courage that week than she could in a life time.

He had mastered the strength to face the parents of Cedric Diggory. He had told them of their sons last stand. He had fronted out the entire school when he had begun going down to breakfast with his friends. And then he had had meetings with her brother every day. He had decided he told both the kids to tell Harry everything, though Ariana only heard what Harry wanted to tell her after the meetings. Which was little and brief, simplified.

He as ever didn't want her to know everything as that would destroy her as a haven from everything which was wrong with his life. He wanted to protect her. Even in his anger and his sadness he knew what he had in her and he was determined not to part with that.

So he had told her little of the prophecy though he explained about the blood link he had with his mother, which was why he had to return to his terrible uncle and aunts.

"Sirius is just as angry as we are though. He says he is going to come and take me out every day. I just have to spend the evenings with Petunia." he said as he sat down and she put her head on his shoulder.

"Then maybe it wont be so bad."

"Maybe."

He doubted it.

He knew his aunt and uncle. They were going to be awful. And then there was Dudley. He really didn't know if Sirius was the right person to be dealing with them but any how that was the way it was going to be. And he would far rather have his godfather there than not.

He only wished he could take Ariana too. Pushing his lips to her forehead he shut his eyes and breathed her in. As long as they were together there was some sense to the world he decided. As long as they were together there was a point to all of this.

-

If anything would have set Ariana spiralling in the other direction again thought albums to himself, it would have been this week. But she had coped beautifully. She had been supportive and she had been generous with her time. She had come so far in the past year.

Albus had some bad news to tell her though. She had only passed two of the four exams she had taken. Yet he didn't even know if that was going to bother her now. Before yes it would have. But it was funny how perspectives changed when something like this happened.

Walking through the entrance hall to the school he made it in just enough time to see her walking back up from the train station. She had obviously gone to see her friends off and there were tracks of tears on her face as she wondered back up to him.

Shaking her head she shrugged.

"I know he is only gone for the week, but I am going to miss him like mad." she said to him.

"I know. You have a friend for life in Harry."

"I really do." she agreed. "I only wish there was somehow he didn't have to go back to the muggles. Albus he hates it there. And he has been through so much -"

"Sister, I know all of this. But it just has to be this way for now." he said putting a gentle hand on her shoulder.

She nodded. She knew it was useless to protest what had already happened. But she had had to try.

"I am going to go and get changed." she said to him.

He nodded. She had been hurt enough that day. Her results could wait. She hadn't even asked about them yet. She obviously didn't care that much.

Going up to the Gryffindor tower by herself was not a pleasant thing. She loved it, but only when it was full of friends as it had been intended to be. There was no Gryffindor house for her when her house mates were away.

Changing, she put on her lilac dress and she felt more like herself than she had all term in uniform. She didn't think she was ever going to get used to modern clothing.

For a moment as she changed her shoes she rested on her bed and wondered what was going to come for her next. From what the others had said to her she got the impression there was no such thing as a comfortable, normal year at Hogwarts and the past year had been no exception.

She felt fear for what was going to come next year. She didn't know why. But she had a bad feeling.

-

"I am sorry."

"It's not your fault. And passing half isn't so bad. It's better than nothing."

The two brothers looked at one another. She had indeed taken the news about her exams better than they thought she was going to.

"Are you sure you're ok?" said Aberforth. It was so unfair. She had worked so hard for her.

"Yeah I'm fine. I knew it wasn't going to be plain sailing. I am just sorry I let you two down."

“As if you have,” said Albus in disbelief. “You had the will to try when many others in your place wouldn’t have.”

“You passed reading and writing, Herbology as well as Care of Magical Creatures. You did well.” Albus smiled at her. “Professor McGonagall says you can continue with Transfiguration as long as you put the effort in which we all know you will.”

“And Snape?”

Silence.

She should have known.

“Well I can just have some more free time in the library.”

“I don’t think so young lady. You are going to pick up Defence Against the Dark Arts.” Aberforth told her.

Albus looked at him shocked. The one who had always been so against her even getting herself an education. And now he was telling her to pick up a subject.

“What he is saying does make sense. Now he is back, you will have to know something about how to look after yourself.” They were not always going to be there to protect her when she needed them. He knew it. It wasn’t going to be possible.

She nodded. She agreed it was the right thing for her to do.

“Ok. I’ll do it.” she nodded.

Albus looked at her lovingly. That was why he adored her so. Because she was willing to give anything a try.

“In the mean time, however you are coming home to the Hogshead.” said Aberforth. It was the summer and she deserved a break. She nodded.

“Where is Harry going to live, at Hogwarts again?”

“Yes. That will be where he will be safest.”

-

“It is good to be home.” said Ariana as she sat on her bed in the pub. She had had her dinner with Albus and then she had returned to the pub with her other brother.

Aba had just come into the room with a cup of tea for her. He was always so loving when she just got back from Hogwarts. Not that he wasn't always but he always seem to make a effort when she just got home.

“I am so glad you think of the pub as your home.”

“You're here, where else would I think of as home?” she asked him.

Sitting next to her, he wrapped her in a bear hug making her laugh. He knew he was going to hear it less and less as Voldemort gathered strength. Why did it have to happen now?

“Are you sure that your ok about your exam results?”

“Yeah, I am going to be fine. It could have been better. I know it could have been worse too.” she shrugged putting her head on his shoulder.

It felt more like they were young again. Now she knew who she was and understood so much more it was easier for them both. He didn't feel like he had to be checking up on her all of the time.

“I'm proud of you.”

“And that is the most important thing.” she grinned.

“I think I am going to sleep well tonight.”

“I hope you will sweetheart.”

She had made it through her first year at school. She had done so well. Even when she had been given the option she had not run away.

“Mama and Papa would be proud of you too.”

She nodded but kept her eyes shut. She hadn't thought much about Percival and Kendra lately. She had been too preoccupied with thoughts of the present. The past wasn't where she was needed.

Where she was needed however was right where she was.

-

Harry could not wait for the morning. Sirius was going to come and get him, and they were going to get the hell away from the Dursleys. That was all he wanted to do. But here he was back where he never thought he was going to be. At Privet Drive.

In his hand though he had a photo of the night of the Yule ball reminding him of the good times he had had in that year. It hadn't all been bad. Some of it had been good. In fact a lot of it had.

The photo showed him with his friends. Ron, Hermione and Ariana. He and Ari were holding on to one another giggling. They had laughed and danced so much that night.

His mind wandered to Cho Chang. Was she doing the same thing? Remembering that she had been loved that year.

The only thing he knew was when they got back when to school, only one of them were going to be welcomed back with loving arms.

And selfishly, he thanked god it was him.

He felt so guilty. Not only had he watched Cedric die, he was now glad he lived to see another day - as long as she was there by his side.

Ariana and him had something real. He was going to hold on to that as long as he lived.

Author note regarding ages: When I begun writing Mad Sanity I made a mistake with ages (thanks to the dreamer-4 for pointing this out to me). Harry and Ariana should have celebrated their fourteenth last year, and fifteenth this year. But because I am so far down the line with the story now, I am going to keep them as they are (it is an AU fic). Age won't have that much influence, but my continuity has already been rather poor so I would like to keep that the same.

On with the story...

Chapter 37

Ariana walked up to Hagrid's. With everyone else away her choices had limited on who she could go and visit. Seeing as he was also one of the only teachers who had passed her he was definitely one of her favourite people at Hogwarts right now.

He was seating out of the steps with Fang by him and he smiled and waved as he saw her wondering up.

"Yer rite Ari?" he asked.

"Yup, I'm good. Just missing everyone." she told him as Fang came to greet her and the dog started soaking her hands making her laugh.

She loved him. He was such a sweet dog and very affectionate.

"I suppose you find it hard being here without the others being about."

"Not hard, just weird." she admitted with a shrug.

"Ay, I guess so." he nodded. "Glad classes are over though?"

"Yeah. Thanks for passing me." she said, suspecting he had done so out of the goodness of his heart rather than because of her grade.

"Had no choice, did I? Yer did well this year." he congratulated her.

She laughed, embarrassed.

"I was proud of you."

"Aberforth said the same thing."

"Must be true then." he shrugged. He was a good person. He was kind and he was gentle and he was one of the best people she knew. She didn't spend enough time with him when he was so kind to her.

"I don't know. The term has ended really weirdly." she said to him.

"Yer tellin me. I don' t think in all ma years here it has ended on such a note," he shook his head.

"From what Harry was saying every year he has been here something has happened. He said told me about the stone, and then the chamber, then I turned up last year and now he has come back!"

"Ay, when you say it like that its sounds bad - "

He shrugged and shook his head.

"Why is it good stuff never happens. And when it does it is over shadow by the bad?"

"I don't know. The news don't highlight the good enough."

"Though it seems they aren't publicising the fact he is back too well either."

"I know. I don't know what the prophet is playing at I really don't. I were talkin to yer brother about it earlier today." "They are calling Harry a liar." she said degusted; she knew him and he was no liar. It was just so unfair. Why was everything like this happening? When he had been through so much already, it was not what he needed.

"I know. Its wrong. Ent that lad been through enough already."

She more than anyone knew he had been through more than enough already. If he got back to the wizarding world next week to find that she wasn't sure what he was going to do. Shaking her head, she let

the half giant put his arm about her as they shared a moment of grief for Harry and worried about what was just about the corner not just for him, but for them all.

-

“The new headquarters we are going to be using will be Grimmauld Place, the ancestral home of Sirius Black. It isn’t the friendliest place in the world but it is the safest for us, that we know of.” Albus told his brother.

”When is the first meeting going to take place?”

“Tomorrow night.” Albus informed him.

“Right.” he nodded.

“Will you be bringing our sister?”

“From what I remember an Order meeting is no place for a child. No, I’ll ask Rosmerta to watch her for the evening. She can do some homework or something.” he shrugged.

“That’s a wise decision I think.” he nodded. There was so much on his mind and he felt the only one he could share it with was the man who was before him. “Hagrid leaves for the mountain this evening.”

“So everything really is under way for the return of the Order of the Phoenix?”

“It looks that way.”

The two brothers wandered into Albus’s private quarters and sat down on his chairs. Albus had always known this day was going to come he thought to himself. How could it not? Yet he had prayed it was not going to come to pass. Memories of last time, just as they did for everyone else, still haunted him. But this time he knew it was going to be the same. The stakes were higher. In fact, they had never been so high.

Not only for them but for the entire wizarding world. In ten years it had seemed they had moved on so much from the hell which had been. They had made progress away from what had been.

There had to be an angel watching over him if he was going to help carry the wizarding world through this. However, perhaps to his heart more importantly his family. Despite their ages he was still the eldest of the two brothers. Aberforth wouldn't be happy if he knew he still thought of him as his little brother and yet it was true. He did. Holding the three of them together had to be a priority for them all. But especially for him. He was the eldest.

-

"Can't I just stay here?" asked Ariana when she heard she was going up to The Three Broomsticks.

"Afraid not. I have already asked Rosmerta to take you now."

"Oh but come on, it is my sixteenth birthday in a matter of weeks. The fourth of August is not so far away now brother mine."

"I know it isn't. But until that day, and indeed till you come of age you are a child. And I am going to protect you as I see fit until then. You are going to be spending the night at Rosmerta's whether you like it or not darling. Get used to it." he said to her as they sat by the bar.

"Fine I'll go. But I won't enjoy it."

"You don't have to." he shrugged as he teased her. "The Order meeting won't be so long. I'll be back before you know it, I'll come pick you up."

She nodded. He knew as ever he was only trying to do the best thing for her.

Going down the road wasn't so bad. She only wished he would let her have five minutes to herself.

Still she knew what she was going to use the evening to do.

-

Dear Harry,

I know we are only apart for a week, and they say that absent makes the heart grow fonder but I wanted to write to you.

It so funny to think I have been here in this era for a year now. Almost over. I have made some great memories and even better friends. But you're the best.

Its always been you Harry.

Now our sixteenth birthdays approach and we'll spend them together. Then the new term...

For all the horrible things in the world that are going on right now I can't help but be grateful for the good.

I can't help but be grateful for us.

As ever,

Your devoted Ariana.

Your devoted....

Those two words spun round Harry's head as he went to sleep and they broke through the depression that had begun to take hold. She had indeed been right to send him the letter and it was with anticipation he thought of their reunion.

Chapter 38

Sirius and Harry walked up to the castle. The hell that had been the Dursleys was over for another year. And it hadn't been as bad as he had been expecting, Harry had to say. Not with Sirius there. He had been true to his word and he had seen him every day, for most of it. He was so angry that Dumbledore had sent him back, even if they knew about the blood bond and it was Albus Dumbledore that Sirius had seen fit to blame for this, even if they had known for a year.

But there was a Dumbledore he was most eager to see. And she was waiting for him on the steps.

On sight of each other, the two teenagers both begun to smile. Throwing his bags down Harry run up to Ariana trying to forget everything what had gone on as he took her back into his arms. It had been a living hell for the both of them, being apart.

"Oh my god, I missed you beyond all belief, you don't even understand." she whispered to him as he held her for the first time since he had got home and thank god he had. She didn't know what she would have done if he had been apart much longer.

"Oh I really think I do," he laughed for the first time in days but he appreciated the sentiment. He was sure it had been just as hard for him as it had been for her, them being apart. It had been an ache in his heart.

Putting her down he kissed her, not letting go of her even the.,

"Ok, one I think the two of you both need a cold shower, and two I am your godfather and you friend. I know this is going on but I don't need to see it." teased Sirius making the teenagers laugh.

"Can we go down to the lake together for a bit?" she said to him. She wanted to have a bit of time with him before the adults all started fussing about.

"Yeah go on . I'll put your bags away in the tower Harry. But I want you both in before sun down, Harry we need to talk too." he had to tell

his godson about the work of the Order, and to make sure he understood.

He knew he had made the right choice about letting them go off for a while. If everything that had happened to Harry had had happened to him, he knew when he got back the first thing he would want to do would be to tell his best friend everything.

Of course, they were a bit more than friends.

-

"I was so worried over you all the time that you were away," she said as she lay in his arms.

The two of them had arrived at the lake and had collapsed into one another's arms. Putting her head on to his shoulder she felt his body behind her. His arms snaked round her. This was what he had been longing for. All the time they had been away from one another. Had it really just been a week,

She had missed feeling him there so much.

"I thought my brothers were going to do my head in while you were away, they were telling me all this stuff about Voldemort and I didn't want to hear it. I just wanted to forget everything except you and me. I wanted it to be real that he wasn't back. I wanted it to be just us."

"I know. All the time that I was with Sirius and my uncle and aunt. All I could think of was getting back to you. Especially after I got your letter. I wanted you so much." he said as he kissed her ear.

He had never noticed how cute her ear was before.

"Let's just forget all of that now it isn't important." said Harry to her. He didn't want to remember. He just wanted a bit of affection from her.

"No. Your right. Let's think about something good. Like our birthdays." she smiled.

“Can you believe it has been a year since the joint party?” he asked her.

She shook her head. “We have known each other for a year now. It has been the happiest year of my life. Do you know what for the very first time in my life I feel as if I am seeing clear? There isn’t any madness. I just feel as if I can breathe the free air and I can see the trees. And I know I should feel as if everything is so sad and terrible. But I can’t. I can’t start thinking like that because I have to believe in a future where we can come through tomorrow stronger.”

“And there is going to be that tomorrow. It might take a while to come but it is so coming.”

Letting out a sigh, he shut his eyes. He didn’t want to talk anymore. He just wanted a bit of time to think and sit still and get ready for his talk with Sirius. There was no doubt in his mind it was going to be much heavier than the one he had had with Ariana.

He wondered if she was going to be there with him when they had the chat. She had to understand too and he had been speaking to them both.

Feeling he just wanted to relax she kept hold of his hands and shut her eyes too. For now they were in Hogwarts, they were hidden by the trees and they were alone. They were safe.

And there was no need to disturb the peace either of them found.

-

It turned out that indeed Ariana was going to be talking with Sirius about the Order and it wasn’t just the three of them. It was her brothers too.

They wanted them both to understand. She wondered if she had been invited because they knew Harry would tell her anyway or because it was genuinely important she understood.

Albus began by telling them about the function of the Order and what it was for.

She had to say despite the seriousness of it all she found the thought of being in a secret society quite exciting. It was like something they would have played for make believe as a child. Only she had to remind herself, this was not make believe on any level. There were real people out there who wanted to do them harm.

Harry sat listening for the entirety of the adults talking and she knew at times he had to restringing himself from protesting there points about the Dark Lord. But perhaps he realised that while this Dark Lord, despite being a catalyst in his life was in actual fact little more than a concept before now. Suddenly he was real to him, he had become real on every level. To all of them.

The Order he knew was a fighting Order. They were going to do something. They were going to have actions to back up their words. War was on the way and there was absolutely nothing they could do to stop it.

"I want to join it." he said to her.

"Well you can't son, not yet." Sirius said to him. "You cannot join as you are still at school. And I intend for this to be over by the time you get out of it."

"So do I, but you have told me I am the chosen one or whatever."

"So we have to protect you."

"But-"

"No buts Harry. You have to know what is going on but you are going to have no part in it."

The frustration he felt was unspeakable. He thought perhaps as he watched Ariana's reaction she might indeed be having the same emotions running through her as he was. But of course, she had always been protected. She had never had to fight for his life as he

had. He knew she was probably going to lay down and take the protection they were offering them. But he didn't know if he could. If the Order was going to be fighting then he knew he wanted to be by their side. He had to be in it. Voldemort was the reason he had never known Lily and James. He was the reason that when Sirius got out of jail that his best friends weren't there to greet him. He and Peter were the reason he had gone there in the firsts place,

"I have to have a part of it, don't you see it?" he asked in his frustration. He had to get across to them how important this was to them.

"This is going to have a impact on all of us, so we all have to fight for the better, don't you see it?"

-

"We all have to fight..." muttered Ariana as she sat in the living room at the pub.

How Aberforth had wished she had not been there when Harry had learnt everything that was surrounding him and the Order. He had been wrong to let her go into that room, he saw that now. He had let her down.

"Save you my darling." her brother said as he sat by her side. He had known that was going to be a question that was on her mind. When he had heard her say so he had been behind her. "I know you think you are well again. But you have missed so much in the years you were ill and you are so young. You're the only innocence left in my world." he said more to himself than to her as he stroked a strand of her hair out of her face. "Darling I want you to have a childhood before you reach such an age when you can't." he said taking her hand. "You are a child. I know you like to think that since you and Harry are together you have grown. But there is something in your eyes that tells mere all I have ever needed to know about my darling sister. don't grow up too soon. Don't fight."

"Oh Aba," she sighed with a heavy heart. "What is going to become of us?" reaching out her hand, she grazed his cheek with her thumb.

When she raised her head from looking at the fire to him, he saw clearly that tears had gathered in her bright eyes.

The top of there heads kissed as their forehead met and he shook his head.

“I wish I knew. But I beg you trust me.”

“You are my brother. But asides that you are my oldest, most loyal and faithful friend. I trust no one above you. Not even Harry.”

Chapter 39

"You are writing to Ron and Hermione?" asked Ariana as she came up behind Harry and run her hand down his neck.

She had come to the Gryffindor Tower to see him. Since they had been told about the Order between the two of them they had talked about it little.

"Yes," he nodded and gave her smile as he dipped his quill into the ink. "I want them to come up to the school and celebrate our birthdays with us. Sirius has agreed."

"It'll be nice to see them. Somehow the day they all went home on the train seems a long time ago now." she agreed, walking over to the window that over looked the green. It was a sunny day. Summer has come to Hogwarts as it had the last year. Bright was the sun that shone on to the lake.

"Doesn't it just? The entire term seems so long ago." he agreed.

Yet it had seemed so for him even before it had come to its devastating end on the platform.

She had been right that day in the hospital ward. Things were never going to be as they had been before for them and that fact was beginning to show, there was a tension in the room. Not because they didn't know what to say to one another. But because they had so much on there mind.

"I wish I had a way to say to you what I need too. I wish there were words that sums up what we both feel in this moment. But the fact is we don't."

He nodded. She had something about her that she didn't seem to have before.

-

Hermione had her head in a book. What was new?

“What are you reading?” Ariana asked.

Her and Ron had arrived back at school just two weeks after they had left it though it felt so long ago. Hermione had been more than happy, though she missed her mother and father like crazy. Yet she had explained the night before that she felt knowing what she did, she could not relax in the muggle world. As she had said that she had a look on her face that revealed what she felt, which Ariana could easily relate to. It was a fear of losing what you came from and forgetting what you knew, before you came into the life you lived in the present.

“Muggle history.” she replied. “It was one of my favourite subjects when I was at primary school long with Science, Maths and English. I miss it , so I try to do a bit of reading in the school holidays.” she said as she shut the book and passed it to Ariana to show her the title.

Looking up at her from the front cover were a fine looking couple, the woman with brunette hair and dressed in what appeared to be a blue gown. She had roses in her cheeks and a pearl necklace was about her throat. To her right, a man sat in a suit with no hair but rather a wig.

Reading the title she smiled. It sounded like a warm book.

My Dearest Friend: The Letters Of John and Abigail Adams.

“He was a revolutionary in America. He went to Congress, heard the Declaration of Independence read, went to France and made it back to be President. He lived a extraordinary life. At the heart of it was her. She gave him the courage and strength to do some of it while waiting for him to come back to her, even if she didn’t know how long if she was going to be away.”

“She sounds as if she was extraordinary herself.” replied Ariana. She didn’t know why but she had tears in her eyes.

“She was.”

Ariana looked down at Abigail. She knew revolutions rarely came without war and the previous term had heard Hermione refer to the American war of Independence.

She didn't know why but on hearing what she had to say, and looking at Abigail she had a burning curiosity to find out more about this woman as well as the times she lived in.

Hermione let a smile play on her lips. Abigail had waited for John to do what he had to and had supported him all the way. She knew there were going to be comparisons in the relationship she had seen Ariana develop with Harry. Besides that, she now knew exactly what she was going to get Ariana for her birthday.

-

On the second of August just as they had the year before, the Hogwarts staff and Weasley's gathered on the lawn for the birthday party of Ariana and Harry.

It was not nearly as joyful as it had been the year before though she thought to herself. The years before, reunions and love was on everyone's minds. Now they were just trying to figure out how to stay alive.

It felt as if it had been forced and somehow it wasn't real like it had been the year before when it had all just come so naturally to them all.

But despite this Ariana tried to keep a smile on her face. She had to try and make it a happy occasion.

And it was. Today she had been alive sixteen years. The fact she had only really been conscious for seven of them was not mentioned.

The Quidditch Pitch was back to normal after the tournament and so despite Hermione's protests Sirius gathered the kids up and took them down to the field for a while. Ariana's flying lessons had gone well that year (pity there had been no exam, she thought to herself. She knew she would have passed it). A game of Quidditch was the general consensus would go down well.

She flew with Ginny, Fred, Charlie (who had returned to see his family from Romania when he had heard about the third trial) and Sirius on her team and they faced Harry, Ron, Hermione, George, Arthur (who had wanted to join in) as well as Bill (which the boys and Sirius were quick to point out was an unfair advantage). Especially when they wound up winning two of the three games which were played.

That part of the day definitely did not seem so forced.

"Well if I had to lose to any one I am glad it was to you." said Ariana as she and Harry touched down.

"What a graceful loser you are." he said as they put there brooms in the broom shed.

She laughed.

"Well played though."

"It was wasn't it?" she replied as they took each others hands and made there way up the lawn to the front of the school.

"I wish the two of us could just go off to the common room." said Harry to her as they walked.

"I know. Today has been awful and forced and fake some of it even. But they are only doing it because they care for us. We'll have some time together later on. I promise you."

Harry sat by her in the meal in order to try and stop himself having a go at them all for the fake-ness of it. He felt as if he was more and more angry than he had ever been before.

When he was with her though he didn't want to shout as he remember how startled she used to be. He didn't want to ever lose her as she was now. She was what he needed.

And he was what she needed.

By the time that the two of them got back to the common room she had actually had a pretty good time. Albus had not been at the party long which was completely understandable. He was so busy with the Order that he had not had that much time for her at all lately, which she knew was completely as it should be. He had to get things up and running before he had to think about her birthday. Aberforth had been there from start to end though as she had known he would be.

But that day wasn't about her brothers. It was about her and Harry.

Despite it being the second and therefore neither of their actual birthdays they had decided as it was in the middle, it was best to swap presents that day.

"You go first." said Harry

He opened the book to find a copy of The Tales OF Beadle The Bard.

"It was mine when I was a child. You never had much of a childhood and so I thought I might share a bit of mine with you."

The inscription in the cover of the book said -

To Miss Ariana Dumbledore on the occasion of her second birthday, from her father Percival Dumbledore, who despite her mother's protests, can not help but dote upon his darling daughter.

And from Ariana Dumbledore to Harry Potter, who I know will take good care of it.

"I know it isn't much. But -"

"Ari its perfect." he said to her, leaning in to silence her with a kiss.

"I do love you." she muttered. He nodded.

"I think I have always known that."

The anger fled him. She was with him and they were in the common room. Darkness had fallen outside. Voldemort was there. But there was only happiness in his heart. When they were together they were so happy. For a while he found he was able to forget. She was his refuge from the dark as ever.

"I have a gift for you. Would you like it?" he asked teasingly, making her smile.

"Ok." she nodded.

He passed her a box. Inside it was a new clock. "Hermione helped me chose it. I know you got jewellery for your last birthday." he explained. He hadn't wanted her to get her more. It hadn't made sense. And Albus had got her more for Christmas.

"Its beautiful." she said as she looked at the purple velvet garment. "It shall be wonderful when we go out our walks this winter."

"Yes, I can't wait for the snow to come." They were such happy days for them both.

"We have to get through the summer first."

She laughed as he stroked her cheek and kissed her again.

Her darling...

"You are what John was to Abigail to me."

"And what is that?" he asked, not understanding.

"My dearest friend."

Revised – 16 July 2009

Chapter 40

“Rain in the summer. I hate rain in the summer.” said Ariana as she turned to Harry who was sitting on her bed.

Since the day of the party the weather had turned on the two of them. The others had gone home and the two of them had once again been left alone.

Walking back over to the bed, she allowed him to pull her playfully in to his lap and hold her there for a while.

“It’ll stop tomorrow and we are going to be able to go out.” he said to her gently.

The time they now got to spend alone together was seeming ever more precious to him. When he was with Sirius, or the Weasley’s, or Hermione or even Remus who had come to see him and his godfather, they were always so serious.

There was only one person in the world that wasn’t. And that was his love.

Turning her face to his she brushed her lips against his teasingly. In the year she had spent at Hogwarts she had learnt so much about what it really was to court a man. She had expected it to be different somehow to what it was. She didn’t know why. She assumed it was just expectations. With Harry she had thought it was going to be all holding hands and butterflies till they were married, but it wasn’t. And she didn’t want it to be. She wondered what her mum would say if she could see her. She knew her mother would not approve of her kissing Harry as she did before they had wed.

But it felt so right and naturally. It was something she was beginning to understand they both needed.

There was so little good. There was so little comfort in the world as it was for him at times. She would do what she could for him.

But it wasn't just him she was doing it for. She wanted him and she wasn't afraid of that any more. At sixteen she was a young woman.

"We are going to be together when all this is over aren't we?" she asked.

"Of course we are and we are going to be together all the way through it. There was no way I could let you go now."

He watched as she shut her eyes, but when they were opened again he saw there were tears in them.

"You brought me back to life, you know that don't you? It is you who keep me sane."

Raising his hand to her face he stroked her cheek and smiled. It was just the same for him.

"I just want to forget school, him, whatever... can't we go away together?" she asked.

"If only we could."

"You do not think it is possible."

"Not right now, but one day ... I am going to take you so far from here." he promised kissing her.

-

"The Order is now a central part of all of our lives, we are just going to have to get used to it."

"Now which siblings need whose advice"

Aberforth and Ariana sat in the garden together.

The return of the Order was laying heavy on his mind and now that he was sure his sister had returned to her sanity for good, he relied those worries to her.

She looked so like his mother that night he thought. She was in her lilac dress, and in her hand she had her embroidery that she had begun since the beginning of summer, determined that she would complete by the end. She was not going to become so focused on the future that forget her past.

"We all need council from time to time." she shrugged.

"Well I would still be more at ease if the past wasn't repeating itself on us." he said to her.

"Wouldn't we all?"

Somehow since the beginning of summer she was being more severe on herself when they were together. She knew who she was and what her significance was in the days to come.

If her and Harry were ever going to get away from there then she had to keep his head on what was important. Getting through the next year.

How like Kendra she was her brother thought again. It was as if his mother was there in mini form. She was so focused at times.

-

"Sirius wants me and him to go away camping for a couple of weeks before school starts." sad Harry to Ariana.

She nodded. When he had come up to her he had looked sad and now she understood why. He wanted to stay but he wanted to go as well.

"Well then you are going to go and have two great weeks of fun." she said to him shrugging.

"You mean you don't mind?" he asked.

She shook her head. She wished they were going to have more time that summer together than they were now but he had to go with Sirius. It was not just her in his life.

"How could I begrudge you time with your godfather? It would be like you having a go at me for hanging out with Aberforth and god knows I do that enough. No, you go on and have some well earned fun. And as ever, when you get back to start the new term, I am going to be right here for you."

Harry nodded. Embracing one another he felt her sigh.

"It won't feel so long as it did the last time." she said to him, though he wasn't too sure she wasn't talking to herself more than him.

As she lay in bed that night she knew without a doubt she could not wait for the new term to begin.

It was going to be hard. But the wait for it to come was beginning to be unbearable.

An: sorry for the wait for this chapter and that when it came it was very much a 'filler' chapter. We get into next year in the next chapter, and with the arrival of Umbridge things take off! Promise.

Please review.

Chapter 41

By the time that Harry got back to school he found Ariana more than ready to return to lessons. She was getting restless and he rather thought that the rest of their friends were going to be as well. The school holidays were good to start with but there was a stage when they got quite boring.

She was longing to get back into the classroom and start learning again. The previous year had been a challenge but she had enjoyed it in spite of herself and she was equally looking forward to the year that was about to begin.

On the day that school begin she went up to Hogwarts to find her brother. Albus had been understandably busy that summer and he had hardly got to see her which he so regretted. She had grown up again it seemed to her brother who also seemed to have aged. And not in the way she had.

"You looked tired brother mine," she said to him as she walked round his desk and put her arms about his shoulders lovingly.

He kissed her ear as their heads reached an equal level.

"I am sister."

"My poor Albus."

Her sympathy was genuine for him. He had so much on at the moment and she did not want to be a pain or another worry for him but she had to say she was missing him while he was away from her. She had got used to just hour with him every other day at least and that summer they had hardly had that.

Tom's return had made him brake so many promises he had made to her when she had returned to him. He had so wanted to be there for her now.

“Have you got time to have a cup of tea before school starts,” she asked. She knew she was being selfish wanting him to herself for a while when there was still so much to be done, but she missed him.

“If I can’t give you that then I am no sort of big brother at all.” he said. “I think a cup of tea is a very good idea.” he said to her.

Once they had gone through to the private areas of his room he sat down and listened to what she and their brother had been doing over the summer. Again a pang of guilt hit him as he realised once more he had missed out on so much of the time they had been given together. Yet there was another aspect of their talk. It was just talking. He let his mind wander away from the Order for a while and away from the ministry’s interference. He could just listen to her and see her smile.

“So all in all you had a good summer?” he asked, and she nodded. He was truly delighted that was the case. As ever he thought she deserved to have a bit of fun in her life. And as ever he only wished he could have been a bigger part of it.

“It’s been good,” she nodded. It was quiet she had to say. But she had got used to it sort of. Her lessons were in the fore front of her mind. Getting focused and keeping it.

“I am glad my dear.”

“We are still going to have my reading and writing lessons this year aren’t we?” she checked. It was evident from the way in which she asked him that she did indeed want to continue with her lessons. She had thought about it when she had been at home last night and she decided as that was the one time she seemed to have his undivided attention she wanted them to continue.

“Of course we are,” he beamed at her. She hadn’t been the only one thinking about it obviously. She still had a bit of work to do; she certainly could not read up to the standard that her class mates could. No that might take her years to get to. He just hoped they still had years together.

She smiled a smile that warmed him from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. She was so excited about the new term beginning, he could tell. Unlike him (and most probably unlike every other wizard in their world who believed Harry) he still was not convinced that she truly understood the danger that their world was facing. For now at least, he was happy to leave it like that. There were going to be a lot of pupils of his, he thought to himself, who were rather worried about returning to school this year because of Voldemort. Even if they did not think he had really returned then the rumours were going to be enough for their parents to warn them of the danger that might be on coming but she remained oblivious to the true threat.

For now her ignorance could remain her bliss.

Neville, Ginny, the twins and Ariana sat with the trio as they took their positions at the Gryffindor table. Now that they were at the feast it was real that they were back at school. It was so different to the year before. She remembered the way she had been reluctant to leave Aberforth to just go and get sorted. Looking back in seemed silly.

A woman in a pink cardigan had joined the teachers table.

"That has to be the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher right?" Fred asked.

"I don't know. When I was with Albus I forget to ask him." They had got so caught up in other stuff that Ariana hadn't thought about it.

By the end of the feast the group had had their questions confirmed. She was indeed going to be teaching them Defence Against the Dark Arts. But she seemed like she was in the ministry's pocket and from the moment that she interrupted her brothers welcome back speech Ariana took against her.

"She is so rude!" said Ariana as they wondered up to the common room that evening. The way she had patronised every student in the hall! How dare she?

"Calm down. Don't think about her." Advised Neville but no one else seemed to be heeding his advice, and neither would she.

Her evening was made worst by the first years, who she knew were only curious as to what the headmaster's sister looked like but did they have to stare? It was like when she had begun school all over again. Maybe that night was not so different from the first of September the year before. Something's were never going to change she grimaced.

"You know Ariana, he was probably right. We should calm down." Said Harry as he wondered over to the fire where she stood hugging herself, looking into the flames.

"And when did you become the voice of reason. You were calling her every name under the sun when we were coming up to the common room." In fact he had added quite a few words to her vocabulary that evening she was not entirely sure her brothers were going to approve of.

"When I realised that we were both up in the tower and this is the first night since He came back that your brothers and Sirius can't find a reason to split us up. That was when." Harry told her. "See, now there is that smile I love so much. I was worried I wasn't going to see it all night there." He said as he wound his arms about her thin waist.

They had both matured over the summer. And Harry found he not only wanted the physical side of their relationship more than he had when they were fourth years but he had begun to need it. Her touch. Her light, cool fingers against his skin.

She laughed bitterly.

"And there we were last year thinking when we got back to school everything was going to be ok. That things were going to be better, less pressure this year. If anything there is more. I don't know how to make it better for you."

"Stay Ariana. That is all you have to do to make things better for me." she nodded as he pulled her close and lay her head on his chest.

She wished that they might stay there for the entire year. But she knew she could not. Time would move on and there were things they both had to do.

"You know how much I love you. Me leaving is not ever going to be an issue."

"And I too."

They were one another's sweet hearts. And they were always going to be.

"I don't want to let you go." He said to her. The weeks they had been apart had only served to intensify everything that had so far gone between them and he knew she felt it or she would not be there.

"Then don't."

--

In her night gown Ariana crept up the stairs to the boy's dormitory. It was midnight. Everyone had gone to bed to get ready for their first day back at Hogwarts of the new term. If anyone knew what the head masters sister was doing, she thought to herself with a mischievous grin.

Going in to the fifth year dormitory, she found five of the four curtains shut just as she had been promised they would be.

Harry beamed at her from the open one.

He observed her for a minute. Her long white night gown looked as if it belonged in a period drama. Her hair she had brushed out and let it hang down. She had changed over the summer. She was no longer a little girl.

Sliding into the bed next to him, she let him pull the cover over them and snuggled down into his arms. She hoped the rest of the year was going to be like this. Just them, in peace holding on to one another.

It was what she wanted. More than anything.

An: Please review!

Chapter 42

“Harry you are not going to believe this.”

“I don’t like the sounds of that!” Harry had come down for breakfast that morning in what could only be described as a blissful mood. He had been surprised by how much peace he had found in the night before. He hadn’t slept a lot though. He had watched her while she had slept. She had had a smile on her face all night. What could spoil his mood?

Whatever it was he was sure it wouldn’t succeed in that.

He was wrong.

The prophet ran the headline – SISTER OF THE HEADMASTER – Ariana the Abnormal

“You have to be kidding me.” He said to Hermione.

‘Last year the prophet ran a story on the return of Ariana Dumbledore sister of the headmaster. It was a short cheerful piece, as Albus Dumbledore had wrote himself. But now we can reveal the truth which perhaps we all should have expected – the sister is as mad as her big brother.’

“We cannot let her see this.”

“Let who see what?” It was her.

Ariana had her hair tied back in a lose bun, her immaculate uniform on and a smile on her face. She looked as he had felt just minutes earlier.

“Come on tell me Harry.” She said to him with a smile.

He knew he had no choice. Showing the headline to her he watched as her face turned away in horror.

"It's ok." She muttered to herself. She didn't know why she had not been expecting this. Her face was a picture of pain as she turned to meet his eyes. "I don't want to read it."

"Then you don't have too." He promised her.

She nodded at his reassurance. Ignorance would remain her bliss and her safe shell this time. Sitting by him she tried to give a weak smile but it was obvious the happiness that they had found in the previous evening had already been cruelly ripped from them both. Hermione could see it in Ariana's eyes. She had been the first person to ask her when she had returned that morning where she had been and she had been the only one who had not been fobbed off by the story that she had gone for an early shower.

Her first class of the day was mercifully was Transfiguration. That meant she had the hour to herself together before she had to face a real class which was not till the end of the day – her very first lesson of Defence Against the Dark Arts. She hoped she was going to pick it up quick enough. She had a feeling she was going to be needing it - and soon.

She arrived at the familiar classroom which her head of house taught in plenty of time for the lessons. She knew McGonagall was going to be late as she had seen her in the hall trying to assort out the first years and time tables. But it was clear when she walked in the room that she had had time to see the prophet. It was written all over her face.

"Are you quite alright Miss Dumbledore?" she asked with a look of genuine concern.

"Yes professor I am honestly fine." She said in a clear voice determined not to let it get to her. Her mother's wand was out of the desk as was her copy of The Standard Book Of Spells: Grade One. They were nearly through it now. By Christmas they should be on top Grade Two. Of tha, McGonagall was sure.

"Shall we continue where we left off?"

“Yes please.”

The lesson didn't go as well as either of them had hoped it would. McGonagall told her not to worry with it being the first lesson of a new term and everything. It had been a long summer. She seemed sure that all Ariana needed was to get back in to the swing of her lessons and she was going to be fine again. She had to say that she wished she had her teacher's confidence.

Going down to the lake she sat down. She had to say she didn't think she was going to be this pensive so soon in to a new term. A new wave of longing for Percival and Kendra washed over her but she could feel with that now. She had accepted they were gone. But she was still their daughter. And a year wasn't so long to grieve for those you had loved and lost she thought to herself. But if they were then what could they really do? She wasn't fool enough to think that they might be able to protect her from this? No it was time for her to defend herself.

What good was she to Harry like this though? Getting down over everything that went wrong? She was going to have to toughen up.

“Don't let those jerks at the ministry get you down.” She heard a voice say to her from behind. Turning to smile at Sirius she gave the same weak smile she had offered at breakfast. “I know you know that people like that are going to say and do everything they can to make life difficult for us lot. And particularly for your brother.”

“Then they are no better than a group of play ground bully's.” She condemned them.

“Good, you noticed.” He replied earning a small giggle. “You are stronger than they are kid.”

“I know I am.”

Her confidence had grown he thought to himself. And it was still growing. They were going to have to hold her down soon ... she was going to be up there with the rest of her class.

"It is too early in the term to look so down. So I am going to give you a piece of advice which I would have hated at your age."

"Which is?"

"To get up to that castle and hit the books. You need to get studying. I'll help you with your Defense work once you get it." He offered.

"Thanks," she beamed. What he was saying was making sense to her. He had a way of getting through to her when she was down.

Ariana was just about to go and do as he said and get to the library when she turned back to him. "What do you make of Professor Umbridge?"

He turned with a look of disgust on his face. "Don't trust her Ari."

"Believe me, I won't."

-

"You know you didn't have to come up here." Ariana was in the library searching for the books she needed when she had seen Aberforth come in. She should have known.

"What was I meant to do, let you deal with this by yourself?"

"For once, yes!"

"Ari."

She knew she was in a foul mood and whatever she said to him in that moment she was going to regret it later on but she couldn't help it. It didn't help that she felt slightly guilty before him for what she had done the night before. She knew he would not approve. If she had a good at him, if she pushed him away it was like she was punishing herself for him.

Job done.

"You know you don't have to rush up here whenever the smallest thing goes wrong for me, I am not going to flip out." She said to him.

"Well I know you won't but I still wanted to check if you were alright."

"A letter would have done that!" she snapped.

He looked at her with understandable confusion. She wasn't even sure why she was reacting to him like this. She had been fine when she had been talking to the others and she had kept what she had been feeling under wraps. And now here he was - the person she knew she was closest to in the world and she was making him deal with all her pent up frustration. He didn't deserve.

"I'm sorry Aba, I don't know why I said that."

He nodded. "I think I do. I'll see you later sister."

He turned to walk away.

"Oh come on you know I don't mean it!" she called after him.
"Aberforth!"

But he was gone.

She sighed, knowing she had been absolutely vile to him when all he had down was come to watch her back.

"Damn it."

Vile. That also summed up her first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson pretty well.

-

"He is not a liar." Ariana avoided confrontation whenever she could. She knew it wasn't good for her, or for her progress but when someone started spreading crap about Harry she was not about to sit back and just let it happen. Harry had been about to start defending himself when he had heard the voice of the girl sitting next to him.

“Don’t!” He said to her. He was not going to let her get herself in trouble for him but it seemed as if that might be too late.

“Excuse me Miss Dumbledore?” Umbridge asked her in her sickly sweet voice.

“I am saying Harry is not lying, he is back!”

“So then you are saying the ministry is lying, that I am lying” she asked raising an eye brow.

Before she had any real time to think what the consequences of her actions might be, Ariana found herself nodding. Well she might as well go the full hog and back it up with words now, she mused to herself.

“That is exactly what I am saying, Professor.”

“Detention – and a trip to your brother I think. Go now.”

Harry looked at her desperately but secretly she was rather glad to get out of the lesson. She would far rather face Albus than stay where she was. She offered a nod as a way of saying she was ok, but nothing else.

Taking the note as soon as Umbridge had written it she walked up the office she now knew so well. When she was told to enter by her brother’s cheerful voice, she braced herself.

Albus sat in dark blue robes behind his desk, his half moon spectacles hanging on to his nose as he looked at documents.

“Time for our lesson already dear?” he asked but she shook her head. She didn’t know why he had asked that, he knew the answer. Of course it wasn’t time for their lesson, she thought as she passed the note over and slumped down in the chair before him.

“A bad beginning?” he asked.

“She was spreading lies about Harry. I could not sit back and say nothing.” He looked at her knowingly, she knew he wasn’t angry. But at the same time she felt the need to explain.

“I know what I should have done. I can hear her voice in my head – ‘hold you tongue!’” she said mimicking Kendra. “I knew it was wrong even as I did it. But I couldn’t stop.” She explained herself to him. “I have had a bad first day back. The article.” He nodded to show his understanding. “I have also had a visit from our brother who I was unthinkable rude too.”

“As I said – a bad beginning.” It was no longer a question. She nodded.

“I am sorry that is so sister – but you will have to take your punishment – even though I think you did nothing wrong. You stuck up for a friend and you showed your courage. No one could ask more than that.” He tried to reassure her. It didn’t work.

“I am meant to be in class getting to grips with Defence Against the Dark Arts, the most important lesson in my schedule. And instead I am mouthing off to the teacher, having a go at Aba and everything else. I don’t know what is up with me! I just feel so mad!” she said frustrated. The connotations of that word were not lost on her brother even if they were to her in that moment.

He nodded sympathetically. “I think this might be a good time to break out the lemon drops.”

-

Night time had fell over the castle once again. Just as he had the previous evening Harry waited up for Ariana to come to him which she did, once again at midnight.

Her heart had been heavy ever since that morning and as he took her into his arms he held her tighter than he otherwise might of knowing that more than she ever had before she needed his comfort. It always seemed to be the other way round since he had come back. That he

was always the one in need of her. But the comfort was a two way thing.

“What I did to Aberforth was awful. He was only trying to be kind to me and I was a complete –” she shook her head as she laid it on to her chest, and heard his heart beating under his pyjama top. “I am a terrible person.”

“Don’t you ever let me hear you say that.” Said Harry as he put his hand under her chin and made her look up and into his eyes.

It was only then he released her were sparkling with un-cried tears. She had been holding them in all day. It was as if she had been waiting for that moment so she could reveal to him just how much she had got hurt. Anyone else’s tears made him uncomfortable. But whenever he saw hers he just wanted to wipe them away and free her of whatever was hurting. But what was hurting her that night were her own actions and so he knew there was nothing he could do for her to make it better. He just had to let her cry it out.

“Oh Baby!” he muttered as she tried to stop crying. She didn’t want any of the others to hear she had come to him. “Your wonderful, and things will be better in the morning. I promise. Go to sleep Ariana,” he said, stroking her back.

“I’m such a fool,” she whispered. Here she was with the most wonderful person she had ever met and all she did was cry. “I’ll go back to my own bed if you want me too.”

“That is the last thing if want.” From now on even if she was crying he wanted the two of them to spend every night like this locked in one another’s eyes and arms. “Sleep,” he whispered in her ear. She was exhausted.

“Things will be better tomorrow?” she questioned.

“Yes they will be.” He nodded and kissed her forehead. He rubbed her back tenderly until she fell in to a dreamless sleep.

Please review!

Chapter 43

"A better day," said Harry as he met her at the bottom of the girls stair way which lead into the common room. She had left him at six again, and now as half seven came about they were reunited to go to breakfast together.

"Yes, it is going to be a much better day." She said. There was no point being pessimistic about what had happened the day before. She just had to get over it and make amends.

And go to her detention.

She wasn't looking forward to that.

No matter, she thought to herself. Keep smiling.

Going into the Great Hall she knew there were lots of pairs of eyes on her again. They had all read the article and they were looking for two things. Confirmation of what it said and a reaction. Well she had no idea if she was proving what it said to be true or false as she had ignored it, but she was not going to give them the pleasure of the second. Let them think what they liked. The only ones whose opinions mattered to her were that of her friends and family.

"Good morning," she said to her friends as cheerfully as if it been any other day. They had seen what state she had been in the night before and it was obvious from there shocked expression they had expected it to continue over into that day. Hermione beamed as she saw her fighting back against what had happened. Ari was getting on with it.

"Heard you got into trouble with Umbridge." George grinned.

"We're proud of you kid," agreed Fred they muttered making her laugh.

"Thanks guys. I'm proud of me too!"

"That's the spirit!"

She ate more than she would on a regular day Harry noted as she dipped her toast into a runny egg and filled her glass with a second helping of pumpkin juice. She was going to make this work he thought to himself. She really was.

"I am going to go up to Albus early. I need to talk to Aba." She said as she wiped her hands clean on a tissue.

"Ok," said Harry but as she went to go, he grabbed her hand and pulled it towards him. Placing the tenderest kiss on her palm, He smiled at her. "For luck,"

She smiled, bent down and brushed their lips together. "Love you."

"I love you too sweetheart. See you at lunch."

"Yup." She said and raced off to the headmaster's office. She had a job to do.

-

"Oh come on brother mine I know you are there so you might as well let me say sorry to you. Please I feel awful for what I said and did you you. I was wrong, and I am so sorry."

Aberforth came round the corner and stared into the flames that danced with his sister's face in them.

"I was in a really bad mood. Not much of an excuse I know but it is the only one I have going for me right now." She admitted to him. "Cut me a bit of slack please." She gave him a huge grin that she knew was going to win him over. It always did and he gave a soft grunt to disguise a chuckle she was sure. "I will make it up to you. Double shifts collecting glasses at Christmas and everything."

"Alright kid doesn't go overboard."

"So am I forgiven?"

"Yes."

She gave another grin. "I love you Aba."

"You and the rest of the world does. Get your butt to class lass." He said and she pulled her head out the fire to find Albus had arrived.

"You two sorted out?" he checked but that fact was written all over her face.

"Yeah, we're good." She said as she got off her knees and back to the desk with a radiant smile on her face. Yes, she was in a very different mood to the one she had been in the day before and for that he was grateful. When she was in that sort of mood than there was no reasoning with her. And more than that there was no teaching her either.

It was time for her to start reading by herself. She was going to have home work. Muggle novels for now were going to be her main studies. Good night Mr Tom was the book he issued her with first.

"Not only will you find it interesting but it is also going to fill in some gaps about what happened on the world while you were gone. It's time for you to build on what you have already achieved."

She nodded. That was exactly what she intended to do.

The hour as ever passed far too quickly for either of the liking and she wished they could have another but she had to catch up from Hermione's notes what she had missed in the rest of Defense. She didn't believe they were not doing practical. She had practically conquered her fear of magic now. It wasn't a factor in her life. It didn't control her. She controlled it. And now just when she needed a good tutor more than ever she was stuck with Umbridge. She hadn't thought it was going to be like this.

Why had her brother even employed her? She had thought him a good judge of character until now.

Lunch was enjoyable, and Harry was pleased to see that Ari's good mood had flourished throughout the day rather than ended. He put

that down to her and Aberforth making up. He knew she could not stand it when they fought. Hand in hand after they had finished off their soup they headed off to the greenhouses where she placed herself between him and Neville.

Care of Magical Creatures she found not half as enjoyable as it was when Hagrid was about. Having not returned from his Order mission yet, his class was being taken by another professor. But Hogwarts was not the same for any of them without him.

She didn't even feel as if she wanted to concentrate in what was normally her favourite class without him teaching her. And so she spent the class thinking back over the past two days. Yes there had been the bad points, but the nights. She let herself smile.

Laying there at night with Harry just holding her was her personal version of heaven she was sure. They were so happy when they were there just the two of them. Bed time was fast becoming the favourite time of the day. As she stood side by side she let the backs of their hands brushed together. He turned to her and smiled at her as if she was teasing him.

All she had to do now was get through that damn detention and then she would have made up for the day before. Not that she regretted what she had said to Umbridge. If she had to she knew she would have done that bit of the day all the same.

"What time are you going to her office tonight?" asked Harry as if he was reading her mind.

"Eight o'clock." She replied with her obvious dread in her voice. She didn't want to go. All she wanted to do was snuggle up with him.

"Do you want me to walk you down?" he asked.

"That would be nice." She replied. "I have to get some extra work done first though."

"When don't you?" he chuckled.

By half seven though she had disregarded the stuff she really had to concentrate on and she had dug her teeth in to her new book.

"I remember reading that one when I was at junior school." Said Hermione with a smile.

"Did you enjoy it?" queried Ariana.

"I have to say I did. There were some sad bits but it had a happy ending, and I am not going to give the ending away."

At quarter past she and Harry left for the office. Tucked under his arm she felt more secure than she had if she had had to go on her own.

"Thank you for walking me down." She murmured to him.

"I should have brought a camera. Ariana's first detention. I think it's sweet." He teased her. "What did your brother say when you told him?" he asked. Calling him 'Albus' was just too weird.

"He said I had to do my punishment." She sighed.

"Well when you are done come to me, no matter the time."

"I intend too." She smiled cheekily.

"I'll wait up in the common room." He promised kissing her forehead. He didn't want to wait in bed not knowing if she was ok.

She nodded as they got to the door.

"I'll see you in a bit," she said as she knocked.

"Come in!"

Harry gave her a longing look as she disappeared. He would do anything to take her place at that moment. He shut his eyes in pleasure. She had been through a rough time and so had he. But never had he enjoyed their relationship so much.

-

It didn't take Ariana long to work out that the red 'ink' that was coming out on to the paper was in fact her own blood. She didn't cringe away from it though and stubbornly did she keep writing through the night as the words cut into her hands. She wasn't going to let her win. A tear of pain trickled from her eye a couple of times but swiftly was it washed away. Umbridge was not going to win. She would go to Albus. She would tell him what she was doing. And then he would stop her she thought to herself.

A grim determination came over her that day. She had never felt so sure that she had been right to say something as much as she had been yesterday.

Silence was her defence. As long as she didn't say anything or make a sound she felt sure she was going to be able to get through this.

It felt as if the detention went on for a life time. The seconds passed slowly.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

"Very well Miss Dumbledore, I think you have learnt your lesson," said Umbridge at the end of the night.

Ari nodded. She wasn't sure if she was going to be able to restrain herself if she had to talk to her and she was not going to go through that again.

When she was released from the office she knew she should go straight back to the Tower and to Harry but with her hand in the state that it was she knew she couldn't. She had to clean herself up first.

She washed her hand carefully under the water though it sting with every drop. Biting back the tears she forced herself to try and smile. She didn't know what Harry would do if he knew what she had been out through and she did not want to find out. The last thing either of them needed was for him to start his own war with the women though part of her begun to fear that was rather inevitable. Oh, she wished

that they had stuck to the first plan and that he had gone to bed. She had been grateful when he had said it at the time but she now realised it would have just been easier if he had gone up to bed to wait for her.

Sighing heavily as she made her way into the common room she pulled her sleeves over her hands. However horrible her detention had been it was over now and she had a night in Harry's arms to look forward too.

Yes that was a far more appealing thought.

It was ten thirty when she got back but he had stayed true to his word and he was waiting for her when she returned.

"How did it go?" he asked through a yawn which he tried to stifle.

"It was long and boring." She said in indifferent tone which she realized a year ago would have been impossible for her to muster. "But it's over now." She said as he embraced her tightly, kissing her hair as he did so.

She loved him so much. She thought her heart might burst. How had she spent so much time away from him that summer? She drank everything about him in. "Are you tired darling?" she asked.

"Yes I am." He admitted to her. The common room was clearing now, the last few people making their way up to bed. Only the seventh years didn't show a sign of moving.

"Shall we go up?"

"You'll come when you're ready?"

"Of course." She said giving him a kiss on the lips. "All I have to do is wash, change and wait for the others to go to sleep. Then I'll come."

If only Voldemort hadn't come back and Umbridge wasn't there, she thought bitterly as she headed up to get ready for bed. Then they would be truly contented.

-

“Ariana?” Harry muttered unhappily in no more than a whisper.

Her eyes fluttered open. “Is it six?” she asked groggily.

“Quarter too.” He nodded.

“You woke me early,” she muttered shutting her eyes. “Let me sleep.” Snuggling into his chest again she hoped she had silenced him.

“I need to talk to you,” he muttered in her ear and her sleepy eyes fluttered open so she could see him, wonderful in the morning sun light.

“What is it?”

“Your hand.”

She hadn’t even realised he was holding the hand that Umbridge had cut with her quill the night before. And she had been too tired when she had fallen into bed the night before to consider the fact Harry might have found it.

“It’s nothing,” she dismissed it unconvincingly.

“Tell me Ariana. Please no secrets. Not between the two of us.” He said as he looked at her hand again. “‘I will not lie.’ Carved into your skin.” He muttered. “Who – I mean how – this...your detention!” he said putting it all together.

Not telling him when she returned had been one thing but lying to him all together was something quite different. He knew what a sadistic person Umbridge was. What could she say?

“Yes.” She nodded. “She had this quill; she made me write lines with it.” She confirmed. “It hurt.”

“She hurt you.” It was a statement. His voice was no more than a whisper and his eyes were intense as they stared at her. There was a fury in him that had been waiting for days to come out. And nothing ever got him as angry as her pain did.

“It doesn’t matter.” She denied. “It’s over, please let it lie.”

“Let it – Ariana how can I?”

“For me? Do it for me.” She pleaded.

“And if it was the other way round, then how would you feel? What would you do?”

“Naturally, I would be furious if someone so much as laid a finger on you. But I would also respect your wishes. Please Harry, leave it.”

He looked at her doubtfully. It was against every instinct in him to let it lie. She was – so fragile. He knew she had begun to hate people seeing her so. The 20th century was rubbing off on her at last. But he remembered how he had seen her that first time when she had been in the forest and he knew she was wrong. She very much needed protecting. And yet she wasn’t running for his help as she might have the following year. She was being...a Gryffindor.

He pulled her into his arms together but sighed and she knew for once she had won the argument and she had been right to do so. Holding on to him, she shut her eyes though neither of them were tired any more, they were just lost in their separate thoughts.

“Corridors,” he muttered.

“Hmm?”

“I’ve been dreaming about corridor for months, I keep going to them at night. I don’t know why.”

-

“Don’t give her the satisfaction of seeing that she has got to us,” Ariana muttered as the two of them went in to the Great Hall for breakfast. “Not that she has. Someone as pathetic as her never could.”

He shook his head. He was still angry over what had happened and he had every right to be. At least she had not tried to deny him that. Yet.

The usual crowd were there as they sat down.

“What doesn’t help is that we have her today. What if it is like last lesson? I swear Ariana if she says anything to either of us —“

“Then we are going to hold our tongues Harry James, I am serious.”

She turned to face him. He had burst out laughing at her.

“What?”

“I think I like this new dominate Ariana.”

“Good.”

She turned down to where she was buttering her toast as a blush rose into her cheeks furiously.

“Are you too done?” Hermione asked from across the table.

“For now.”

“Good because there is something more pressing on my mind. You two were right about one thing. If this lessons today is like the one we had last time we need a way round this. We need a proper Defence teacher.” She whispered so low that only there group of friends could hear her.

“What’s this?” a voice behind Harry came. “A conspiracy?”

Hermione beamed.

Of course.

Sirius.

Please review!!!

Chapter 44

The weekend did not come soon enough for Ariana and Harry. The week had been long and stress filled. They knew there was still plenty to do. Especially now that they had Sirius on board, but they would also make time for one another just to relax together.

Sirius and there new 'club' had too, of course, take priority though. All of them knew that. She couldn't believe how easily it had all come together though. Three days on from Hermione having her wonderful idea they were talking about getting there Defence Against the Dark Arts Club together for their first meeting in the Room of Requirement. Where they were going to hold the meetings had initially been a problem, but they had soon sorted it, again thanks to Sirius who had reminder Ariana of the room where she had had her fit the year before when the other schools had come to Hogwarts. That room was whatever they needed it to be.

Three days. Everything was moving so fast, but she was glad. It was exciting.

Harry walked down to the common room when he was ready and found a shocking sight. Ariana – in a pair of jeans and blouse.

"You're kidding me right? They got you out of your dresses at last?"

"It was Hermione's idea; she said it was going to be much easier to get involved if I was in jeans rather than in a skirt. Do you like them?"

"I don't know."

"Me neither. Not very me are they? They're coming straight off after we are done. I am going back to my skirts." She muttered to herself. She may be becoming accustomed to the ways of her new world but some things were never going to change.

He chuckled a little. She certainly knew her own mind these days.

With the twins, Neville, Ginny, Ron and Hermione the two of them went to the Room of Requirement holding hands. A smug smile was

on the new 'teachers' face as he welcomed them to the first session. He had been right. It was Lily and James all over again.

He shook those thoughts out of his head. It was time to get on with the practical side of the club.

Stunning spells to begin with Sirius had decided, they were going to be essential if they were going to come up against Death Eaters. Certainly they had helped him out in the last war.

A wave of sadness crushed at his chest as he looked at the young people who were about him laughing and joking together. The love that he was around. Were they really to lose it? As so many as his generation had.

"Ron and Harry, why don't you two guys go first?" he offered after he had demonstrated.

He remembered when he had been young he had not got the chance to practice on James first which he had no doubt would have helped it when it came to the real fighting.

"Not too hard now boys, we want no comas here today." He said just as they were about to begin making them laugh.

"Stupefy," chanted Harry at Ron. Sirius had been watching them but out the corner of his eye he saw Ariana twitch as the spark flew out of Harry's wand.

By the time Harry had turned to her she had replaced her unhappiness with a smile but it had been noted. Sirius began to question whether she of all people should even be there.

When the time to come to pair up came, Ron stuck with Harry, the twins went together and so did the girls leaving Ariana's with Sirius. He was glad he had the chance to talk to her.

"Do you want to do this?" he asked having read her expression.

"I need to. My brothers think it is right for me and I want to be good it." More than anything she wanted to keep up with the others now. "But just looking at it – firing my wand at another witch or wizard. I don't know if I can control my magic that well. Transfiguration is different."

"Yes it is, it is very different. I don't think you would hurt me if you tried. These guys aren't doing too much damage." She said as they looked at the three pairs practicing about them.

"No but I would have to really focus. And I don't know how intense the magic that came out would then be. I don't want you in a coma."

"You still don't trust your own magic at all do you?"

"It's never given me reason too."

He hadn't realised the old insecurities were so present in her still. But when she had seen the light from the wands, the flashing. It had reminded her so strongly of the night when she had been sent into the future when her brothers had been fighting.

"I think I should sit this one out."

"You'll have to try it one day."

"I know I will, but not today. Please Sirius. Let me read up on it, get my head in the right mind set." She asked.

He nodded. While they were learning he thought that was a fair enough request, though he doubted were she too make it of a death eater they would be of the same understanding nature as he was.

"And tell you what when you go for it we can rid of the audience if you like. I doubt they are helping with your nerves." He offered and she gave him a small knowing smile that told him he had been completely right.

"Thank you. You are too kind to me Sirius." She muttered.

"You gave me my freedom, Ari. I have not paid my debt to you and most likely never will. No amount of kindness is enough."

-

"Were you ok when we were all practicing? You and Sirius didn't get round to it." After they had eaten lunch with Sirius, they had gone back to the common room. She had changed into her skirt immediately as she had said she was going too.

"I had some stuff to think about." She said and a worried expression crossed his face. "Don't be anxious. Its nothing out the ordinary. Just stuff I have to consider while we are doing all this I think." She shrugged.

She looked about his dorm room. Everyone had gone out. When she had finished changing first she had gone to check on him. Now here they were alone.

"You're ok all this?" he checked and she nodded.

Walking over to where she stood he took her cheek in one of his warm hand and she shut her eyes as their skin touched together. He smiled at her obvious pleasure and allowed her to reach up to him and kissing him. Slipping his hands down to her neck he caressed her.

"As long as I have you I will be fine," she broke the kiss, but only momentarily. In the next second she had reached for him once more and he felt as she tangled his messy hair with her delicate fingers, exploring him in a new way. The passion he felt for her as they kissed, it was like never before.

He needed her. He always would need her.

Sliding his hands down further he caught her about her waist and pulled her ever tighter and she responded with a deep happy sigh. They hadn't ever kissed like this before. She didn't know you could kiss someone in this fashion.

New feelings rose in him. A feeling he hadn't felt before and he pictured what could happen next - he could pick her up and carry her to the bed. They were both sixteen... they were in love...it was no common fling. They were never going to come to an end. Why shouldn't he?

But before he had the chance to let his thoughts get the better of him, she mercifully took the choice which had seemingly been laid before him by ending there kissed and snuggling her head into his chest. Contented, she shut her eyes and relaxed.

The plan she had formed in her mind was to go to Aberforth alone that afternoon to see him for an hour. She still felt a little guilty for how she had behaved and it had been along week without him. She wanted to share all the secrets she had been carrying with her, about the new club. She had dismissed the thought of telling him about her detention. His reaction would not be pleasant and he had no reason to worry. She was fine.

"Come with to my brothers." She muttered to Harry now though. She could not bear to part from him. Not now. They were too close; it would hurt to be gone from his side. She hadn't felt the need to devote herself to one person before she had met him. But she knew she would till the end of her days.

The thoughts in Harry's head were still a little crazy though. And there was something in his head that told him if he had such thoughts in front of the barman or indeed the headmaster they would know he was having such impure thoughts about their baby sister. Then of course they would be forced to kill him.

"I don't think that is such a good idea. I have a lot of work to do, and Aberforth would want to see you on your own no doubt. I'll see you when you get back though."

She was disappointed but didn't want him to see her unhappiness in his response when he had just previously made her so happy. What a contradiction. "Ok then." She said to him, leaving him with a lingering kiss. Just before leaving though she turned and gave him a soft smile.

Was happiness like this a sin? She wondered.

Most likely.

She walked out of the common room and down the stairs, the entirely familiar route not being interrupted that day by the stair cases.

Sighing happily, she giggled to herself.

The gravel crunched beneath her feet as she made her way across the court yard the route to Hogsmeade sprawling out in front of her, the gate open.

“Hem, hem.” She heard a voice behind her.

No. Not now. Not when she had been enjoying such a brilliantly joyful moment.

“Miss Dumbledore where do you think you are going?”

Turning to face professor Umbridge, Ariana plastered on her face a sickly sweet smile which she knew only the women who was in front of her would be able to match. As ever, the women looked hideous in her pink cardigan.

I must not lie, she thought bitterly to herself and she had no reason too.

“I am going into the village to see my brother,” she shrugged.

“I am sorry Miss Dumbledore, but I do not believe it is an allocated Hogsmeade weekend, dear, is it?” she said talking slowly to her.

Ariana felt her blood boil. She was certainly not her dear.

“The headmaster has always allowed me to go whenever I chose to, to see Aberforth.”

“That might be so, but it is very fair is it? No other student gets to wonder off home whenever they chose.”

“But –“Ariana could feel panic rising in her chest. All she wanted to do was go and see her brother. She had never in her life been told she could not go to him if she wanted too. “I need to see him!”

“No, Ariana I don’t think you do. What you need to do is learn to follow the school rules.”

“But I am allowed to do this; Albus has always made it clear that I can go.”

“Well he never made that clear to me and I would wait to hear it from him.”

“But-“

“Miss Dumbledore, are you once again answering back to me?”

She considered her answer for a second. If it was over anything else then she knew she could silence herself. But her trips to see Aberforth were so important to her. To both of them.

“Yes. Yes I am!”

“Well then I do not think that you learnt your lesson yet. Detention, Monday night.”

She could not believe what she was hearing; she was allowed to do this! Why was she being so unfair?

“Now return to the Gryffindor tower.”

Turning on her heel she ran. She had to get to Albus. She knew he would overrule this. He had too. He would never allow his siblings to be kept apart, not when this was in his power. Tears sprung.

On reaching his office she did not knock but strolled right in only to find it was deserted...

“Al!” she asked called desperately. “Albus, where are you?”

No response.

Going into the private quarters she didn't find him there either. Disappointment crushed her chest, a wave of sorrow flowing over her. Not another detention with her. It was so much worse now she knew what to expect. How was she going to tell Harry? All she had done all week was tell him to try and keep out of trouble with Umbridge.

Knowing she had no reason to rush out she sat down. A voice in her head was telling her she should tell Aberforth then he could come and get her. But then it would contradict everything she had been saying to him about her being able to cope without him. Yet her heart ached for him.

Shifting her position, she laid down on her brother's sofa and she allowed herself to think back to how things had been when she had first got to Hogwarts all that time ago. There was so little time for her to reflect. She was living in the present, yet parts of her craved the past and what she had had then. Her parents and her relationship with Aberforth mainly. It was so different to what it was now. It wasn't worse but it was not the same. Even that summer she had had to acknowledge it. Harry held her heart. The devotion she had felt for him that day... there had been a time when she had been devoted to no one but her brother.

That was different now.

She had gained so much. Sirius, the twins, Hermione, Ron, Neville, Ginny. Her friends. And then there was Harry. A blush rose scarlet in her cheeks. The way he had held her, kissed her. She knew her brothers would be displeased by it but she could not be. The things she had done – the way she had kissed him... was that not meant to be kept for marriage? Yet surely there could not be a wife who loved her husband more intensely than she loved Harry... she knew they were young, but still. She knew what she felt. There were things in the world that had no explanation. That came into existence for no real reason. And that was how her love for Harry was. It needed no explanation.

Getting up she found a blanket on one of her brother's chairs. She was so tired she realised. Just lying there thinking had worn her out somehow along with the other events of the day. A chill came over her.

She couldn't face another detention with Umbridge, she just couldn't.

When Albus returned from London, he found his sister where she had laid herself down, deep in her slumber. He had been gone for such a short time he did not think she would have missed him, but apparently she had.

His dear girl. She had grown up since she had rejoined them, but not so much.

He remembered the night the previous summer when he and Aberforth had spoken about potion.

An angel, he had thought then and again he thought so in that moment. That was truly what she was.

Going over to her he gently pulled the blanket which had been falling off of her up to cover her whole body. She looked so comfortably he could not bear to wake her and ask what she had wanted. He would leave her to what peace she had found in her dream. Kissing her forehead lightly, he left the room to go back into his office, knowing if anyone wanted her then they were going to have to go through him first.

In that moment a paternal love for her pulled at his heart as he realised she had been in trouble and the person she had thought to run to for help was him. This thought caused a tear to trickle down his cheek. He had got it right so far this time then. He was doing something right.

Chapter 45

“Sweetheart?”

Ariana had awoken. Opening her eyes she saw the morning sun beam in to Albus quarters. Why was she there?

As memories of the day before rushed back into her head her heart weighed her down but not so much as it had the day before. She had had a chance to think about it and she felt better. Yesterday had been a hic cup. Nothing more, she told herself. She was sure that if she really had to endure another detention then she would, though she dreaded it with everything she was.

“Morning Al.” She said giving him a smile as she sat up. He was in his chair eating toast already. He had a mug of steaming tea by his side and turning to the table she saw he had made her one as well. “What time is it?”

“Just gone half past seven.”

Brushing the hair out her face she sat up, the blanket still round her legs.

“Harry – he doesn’t know why I didn’t go back.”

“I wrote to your friends at the Gryffindor tower explaining you were somewhat indisposed last night.” .

Picking her tea up she nodded gratefully at him and relaxed.

“Thank you.”

He nodded. “It was a pleasure Ariana. I am just sad the longest about of time I have spent with you this past six months was with you asleep most of the time.” He said making her chuckle. “You looked like you slept well though.”

“I did, I slept like a dragon.”

"You seemed too." He nodded.

Sighing contently she listened to the clock on the wall for a moment and allowed the comfortable silence between the two of them to take hold.

"Yesterday darling were you ok?" he asked the inevitable question.

She had two options, as does anyone who was asked a question. To lie or tell the truth. He had enough on his plate, she thought to herself. He doesn't need to worry more for his silly sister.

"Yes I was fine. Just wanted to see you. That was all. I suppose I fell asleep while I was waiting."

"Well as long as you're ok." He nodded as she smiled.

"I am fine brother. Just fine."

She finished her breakfast and kissed Albus goodbye before half eight. She had to get back to the common room. She wondered if Harry had missed her and egotistically hoped he had. But what to say to him? She had lied once that day and did not wish to again. And if she did lie then she had to cover up where she was going on Monday night...

She had always told the truth though. Despite what she had done earlier that day, lying did not come easily to Ariana Dumbledore. No she had to tell him the truth. She had too.

Going in to the common room she saw it was still pretty much deserted which was standard for this time on a Sunday morning. Everyone was enjoying the lie in far too much.

Going up to her dorm she grabbed her towel and headed for a shower. When you had a task ahead of you which you dreaded, there was nothing like a bit of time wasting to help you along she thought. She had had butterflies when she had gone to see Harry before, but never in this nervous sick feeling. She almost felt ashamed she had

been caught. She should have taken the clock and all this could have been avoided.

When she walked back down the girls stairs to the common room she found he was there. A genuine smile plaster across her face. She had missed him even if he had not her.

“Morning sleepy head.” She said to him as he greeted her.

Taken her into his arms, he wrapped her body in the love he felt for her. “I missed you.”

Smiling at the confirmation, she sighed for the first time since she had left him contently. “Then I will not leave you again.” She chuckled softly, but her face could not hide what she had to do.

“What is it?”

“Yesterday I did not get to Aberforth’s.” It was better to be straight with him, she told herself.

“How comes?”

“I was walking down there and I got caught by someone. I’ll give you three guesses who it was.”

“No... oh Ari.” The look on his face told her he understood.

“I got upset, I answered back. I’m back in detention.”

“No.” His firm tone astonished her. “I’m not letting you go, you’re not doing it. You can’t ask that of me. You can’t make me watch you go somewhere where I know you’ll be hurt.”

“It’s one night.” She said trying to be strong. But his pleas tore at her heart. The passion in his eyes made her appreciate how much he loved her. Raising her hands to his neck she brought his head down to meet hers. “I’ll be ok.” She muttered.

“No, this is not alright.”

"It is, really." She said to him but he would not be soothed.

"Tell your brother."

"I can't. And anyway, what would he do?"

"Stop it."

"He can't over rule his staff for me. I can't ask that of him."

"Of course you can."

He looked at her and she knew at once she had frustrated him. She was frustrating herself. She knew if he had been there when she had gone to the office yesterday Albus would have known all about it now. But she felt she had to do this - she couldn't always run for help.

Harry, upon hearing her silence, sighed. She was not going to give in this time.

"I need some air."

-

He considered going to her brothers behind her back. He could go and tell McGonagall. He even considered taking her as his hostage on Monday night. But none of those options could he act upon, though the last was the most tempting. Because he knew she had made her choice and he better than anyone knew what she was like when she had got something into her head.

She went through with it. Especially when she was told not to.

Why was she so much like him?

He found himself understanding her completely, but not at all in the same moment.

He loved her. Whether or not he understood her, he loved her. It was growing daily now. He wanted nothing more than her to be safe and protected from what was bad about their life. He had let her and Sirius in after a life time of being alone.

Losing her now was not an option.

Leaving her now was not an option.

A set of cold fingers intertwined with his announcing her arrival at his side. He knew she was worried still.

The day was cool and an unseasonably chilling wind was blowing storm clouds above them over Hogwarts.

“Don’t ask me to keep my cool in class with that woman ever again.” He said in almost a growl.

“I won’t.” A timid reply came from his side.

“Let me protect you.”

“You can’t protect me from myself. I promise I will keep my lips sealed from now on. And I’ll be ok on Monday night.”

“I feel as if I have let you down.”

“Don’t you dare say that? It is the other way round if anything.”

“How could you ever let me down?” he said turning to face her. “You’re the light in the darkness.”

He watched as a singular tear escaped her eye. She looked so ... like Ariana. It was the only way to describe it. He knew she wasn’t overly beautiful. She wasn’t sexy, he thought cringing at the very idea of her being sexy. But she was his world. She was his.

Tilting her head to face him, he kissed her as he had the day before when they were in the dorm room. He shouldn’t have let her go. She

responded as lovingly as ever throwing her arms about him and kissing him with every fibre of her being.

They stayed there by the lake for a long time.

-

Ariana awoke on Monday after a rough night. Sunday had not been a joyous day after even her and Harry had settled their differences. Then she seemed to develop a head cold over night.

Just brilliant, she thought to herself as she put her tissues in her bag sure she was going to need them over the course of the day.

"Come on," said Harry as he saw her looking miserable as she came down for breakfast, "it is going to be alright."

"I know it is." But the feeling he wanted to protect her was overpowering once again.

Leaning in to his arm, she allowed him to lead her down to the breakfast table where she drank tea and merely picked at her toast. It was never a good sign when she didn't eat but with the mood she was in Harry knew better than to tell her to eat up. She would not have appreciated his concern he thought.

Professor Dumbledore threw her a worried look though he noticed.

The day passed slowly. After her transfiguration lesson (which went mildly better than the week before) she went back to the common room. Her head was aching and instead of using her time productively she curled up in front of the fire. She wanted to do absolutely nothing.

That Defence Against the Dark Arts was a particularly painful lesson was an understatement. She was beginning to understand that as passionately as Harry could love, so could he hate. Umbridge was an evil woman in her eyes for making him so angry. She didn't care that she hurt him anymore. But the fact she hurt him?

Hurting Harry in her eyes was an unforgivable crime.

She breathed an audible sigh of relief when they left the class room. The two of them had opted to sit at the back (more her choice than his) and so were out the class first and left alone by their professor for the majority of it. She chose to ignore them, rather than antagonize them which was fine by Ariana.

She knew he was spoiling for a fight now though and one day he was going to be too determined to get it for her to stop him.

-

After dinner Arana left for the defence classroom. Knowing he was unlikely to leave her there if he walked her as he did the time before, Ariana declined Harry's offer to walk her to the detention. On top of that she was more nervous then she had been before and did not want him to see her so distressed. Her anxiety worried him. It was the last thing either of them needed.

Composing herself, she took a deep breath and walked into the classroom. The toad like women was already there and waiting for her.

As was the quill.

Taking the seat where she had been just a few evenings previous she mustered her courage.

"What must I write?"

You are a Dumbledore ... Act like one...

"I will not break school rules," said Umbridge imperiously.

It was with a shaking hand Ariana picked up the quill. Sweat broke out.

Think happy thoughts, she told herself.

But it was hard when she felt she was going to be sick at any moment. There was a lump in her throat.

How long was she going to have to endure this that night she wondered?

It was going to be longer than before she was sure.

Four hours later...

Tears cascaded like a river that had broken its dam. If Ariana's legs were strong enough to run then she would have. But after four relentless hours, she couldn't.

Turning on to the next corridor after the once the Defence Classroom was on she learnt against the wall and collapsed.

She hadn't felt like this in so long.

She wanted to let it out to scream, but if she did then so would her magic and for the first time in months, she felt as if it might be out of control.

She breathed deeply, in and out, in and out. She had to get a hold on herself. One thing was for sure. She could not go back to the Gryffindor tower as she was. But neither did she feel she could or wanted to be alone. It was in that moment she decided to do what she should have done so long ago.

Go to Albus and tell him what had happened.

She tried desperately hard not to look at her hand. It burned her enough without looking at it.

She had to control herself, she just had to, there was no other choice.

Getting up off the floor tentatively, she walked slowly, trying to keep calm. She was feeling a little better than when she had first got out of

the office she had to admit but she still desired to see her brother above all others. And she knew she was not in control of herself.

He had to be there. He had to be there.

Her pale face was still covered in fresh tears as her unsteady feet begun the climb up the stairs to his office.

Oh, she wanted her brother!

“Do you want a drink?” she heard Albus ask through the part opened door.

He had someone with him already. No, no, no!!!

“I run a pub brother. I don’t need a drink when I come here,” Said a cheery voice she knew in return.

Relief swept her. It was Aberforth. Longing for him now she knew she was going to him over came her.

“I guess not. Lemon drop then?”

It was then she knocked on the door and stumbled against it a little.

Both sets of blue eyes turned to face her and a mixture of anger, pity and grief showed in both of them.

“Al...Aba.” the sound of her brother’s names shattered her and she gave way to her tears. Collapsing to the floor she sobbed.

Her body shook.

“No.” She mumbled. A moan followed it.

A spark that came from nowhere. A scream that broke the men’s hearts.

Breathe, breathe, breathe...

Ariana kept focus. This was not going to happen... she was so much stronger than this, she told herself, but tears flowed on and on.

"It's ok, darling. It's ok sweetheart, I'm here." A pair of strong arms pull her back from that dark place in her head and she shut her eyes as she turned into her brother. The familiar smell reminded her of home and she buried her head in his chest.

"Aba...."

"I'm here angel, it doesn't matter, I've got you. Shh, hush baby, its ok."

As Albus got to his knees, he stroked her hair. Summoning the blanket she had used the other night from his room, he helped Aberforth cover her. The two were no longer warring. They were in that moment utterly united, all three Dumbledores together. Voldemort could have walked in to the Scholl and Albus would not have left his siblings. Not this time.

Stroking her face Albus helped to calm her in a way he never could have before.

A minute passed. Five. And then ten. But none of them moved. Ariana felt a warmth take her. She felt calmer but somehow she was still crying and shaking uncontrollably. She clutched at a hand not sure who it belonged to.

"Don't leave me."

"No one is going anywhere." Albus promised her.

"Sorry," a defeated whisper came from Ariana.

The firm thumb that caressed her cheek told her it was ok. A kiss was dropped into her hair.

Ari knew no more. Sleep claimed her.

Author note: Please Review!

Chapter 46

Three o'clock in the morning.

Harry James Potter had retired to bed but he was not asleep. He could not be further from it. Where was she? He thought Ariana would be asleep in his arms by now. But no. He didn't even know where she was.

An hour earlier he had got so sick of waiting for her he had gone down to Umbridge's room to check if she was still there. She wasn't.

The only place he thought she would have gone was to her brother. But then if she had gone to him something would be wrong, and he felt he couldn't just go up there. If she was with Albus though he had to admit he felt sore. He wished whenever she was in trouble it was him who she run too.

But it wasn't. And so he lay there in the darkness, anxiety taking him further in to his worry as he hoped at any moment she would walk through his door and come to bed.

-

Ariana stirred fitfully in her brothers arms. She was running a temperature and moaning out pathetically in her sleep, and he held her tighter all the time. He hadn't felt as if she was going to disappear in so long. Neither of them had. But the fact was Albus's expression matched what was in his heart.

The two of them had carried her through to Albus's sitting room when she had fallen asleep. Albus had then sent to Poppy to get some Murtlap Essence to heal her hand. He had an idea of who had done this to her. Anger pulsated through him, as he tied a bandage around her hand to stop the wound becoming infected. Tucking it in to the blanket, he let a tear drop onto his cheek before he wiped it away. Aberforth could see the physical pain his brother was in at their sister being in the state she was. There were to be no quarrels. All they could do was think and wait for her to awake.

"My sweetheart..." mumbled Aberforth after a while. He could not stand the silence. "I never wanted to see her thusly again brother."

"I though we'd cracked it. I honestly thought she was alright, better – cured."

Aberforth merely shook his head. They had hoped for this but they had asked too much of her.

"Do you remember what I said to you when we first spoke about her coming to Hogwarts?"

"That you would only agree to it if she was safe, comfortable, happy and protected." Albus recalled. He should have seen this coming. But what was harder to admit to himself was he agreed with what his brother said next.

"She is none of those things." Said Aberforth. "I let her down. Let my guard down. Look at her hand." He said taken the bandaged one carefully into his own. "No more."

"You want to take her home?"

"Will you stop me?"

Albus shook his head. Any other time he would have fought to keep her there. But she had not been talking to them and so they could not take care of her. He had to look after the Order, and he was sufficiently concerned to agree she needed twenty four hour care right now. When Umbridge left as she undoubtedly would at the end of the year, they could start talking about her education again. The times were so dangerous and he would under no circumstances lose her again. No one would take her from them, or her innocence from her.

Selfish of him? Yes. He had always known he was a selfish being. But his love for her was so great now.

"No more pain." He shook his head sadly. "We'll find a new way to control her magic. But for now, she needs you."

Aberforth nodded. He didn't know for sure what he could do for her but he could make her safe. That was essential to both of their happiness now.

As she moaned out he begun to rock her in his arms the way their mother once had.

"Come now little one," she had whispered to her daughter. "Sleep peacefully."

Pressing his lips to her forehead he tried to make sense of what had happened to her, but until she woke there was little chance of him doing that. So he held her and prayed that he could be a better brother from her from now on. He had to listen to his heart where it came to her. Not his head.

He would always be there, and never again would she have to face a storm alone.

He shut his eyes and prayed the night passed quickly.

--

As soon as the hour was reasonable Harry was sent for by Professor Dumbledore to his immense relief. It had to be something to do with her and if she was with the headmaster then surely she was ok?

Knocking to go into his office, he turned the door handle and the first person he saw was not Ariana as he had hoped it would be but Sirius who had been sent a message to come to the office before his godson. But now he knew what was going to happen, he had felt a duty to stay while Albus told Harry. He was not sure how he was going to react to the news.

"Harry thank you so much for coming." Said the Headmaster. Albus had come out side door to his office and had swiftly shut it behind him as if he had a secret in there. Harry's instincts told him, that was where she was, where his Ariana was.

"Is it Ariana, is she alright?" he asked quickly.

"She had an attack last night. She did magic without meaning too."

"Well is she ok?"

"She was distress, as you can imagine," Albus replied. Sirius nodded. Harry remained quiet. "As you can imagine it distress myself and our brother considerably as well. That is why we have come to the decision that it would be well if she were to return to Aberforth's care, just for a while perhaps."

"Return to – she's leaving school." Harry realised and a devastated look took hold of his face.

"We have asked too much of her."

"She's coping..."

"Harry." Sirius muttered warningly. "I am sure that Aberforth and Albus know what is best for her."

"But she is not going to want this," he told them.

Albus had been denying this fact to himself all night and he had refused to think it till Harry had said it. He was right of course. Ariana was not the girl she had been a year ago and even then she had refused to leave. But this time she was not going to have a choice. Her guardians had made it for her.

"I love my sister dearly. Please trust mine and Aberforth's judgement."

Harry sat back and considered what he was saying. There had been moments that term when she had been in trouble and no one had been there when she had been so in need.

At least at the Hogshead she would be out of harm's way and Umbridge could not get to her. He saw the advantages of her going to safety.

Now he thought about it... he did trust Professor Dumbledore. Nearly above everyone else.

"Ok," he said to them. He could see the logic. "This might be the best thing...but will I still see her?" he thought out loud. And what about night time?

"Yes." Dumbledore promised. "I'll make sure you see one another regularly."

"Ok." He nodded. If she was away from Umbridge then that could only be a good thing. They were strong enough to get through separation that was a fact. It wouldn't be for so long.

"How bad was the attack?" asked Sirius.

"We did not have to take her to the hospital wing – but she hasn't let go of Aberforth all night. And her sleep was interrupted by bad dreams I think."

Harry felt a way of annoyance towards Aberforth. If anyone should have cradled her all night it should have been him.

-

Ariana opened her eyes. Her night had been filled with dreams she could not comprehend. They were not vivid but maybe that was what had made her fear what had been happening in them. Flashing of light. Heaps on the ground.

She knew what the bangs and flashing were. Uncontrolled magic.

Shaking her head she held on to Aberforth. As much as she had disliked her dreams she did not want to wake up.

She knew what she had done and she hated that fact.

"Come now my sweetheart, it is not so bad." A voice murmured to her. He knew she was awake.

Opening her eyes he saw the sorrow in them and the misery. But they had to talk and they had to brake it to her that by the end of the day she would have left Hogwarts.

Sitting up but staying close enough so that her brother could still cuddle her, she sighed. The blanket remained tightly about her as well.

"All will be well."

She nodded but it was quiet clear she had little faith in that. She felt defeated. She had never wished to do something like she had the previous night again. And now.

Turning into him again she buried her faced. It was times like these that she was so grateful for his kind loving nature when it came to her. He was a fabulous brother. She only wished she could be a better sister.

He and Albus were both getting old now. They shouldn't have cause to worry for her as they did.

A knock on the door alerted her to the fact they were not alone as she was sure both of they would have liked to have been in that moment.

"May we come in? Sirius and Harry are with me," they heard Albus asked tentatively.

Aberforth looked at her and she nodded. She wanted to see them both.

When they walked in Ariana did not get up and rush to meet him as Harry had hoped she would but she stayed quite quiet at her brothers side as she might of in the days when they had only just met. Last night had shaken her and it was written all over her face. Her fingers were curled round her brothers arm and she had her head on his shoulder and she looked alert in a tense way. It was as if she was waiting for something to come and take her away.

She looked small.

"Hey Ariana how are you?" asked Sirius with his usual cheer. "We heard you had a little trouble last night."

"I did." She nodded.

"No matter, pet. It's over now."

She shot him what could only be described as a dark look. She was unsettled they all knew it. Her happy life had come crumbling down around her. Her peace...

"Maybe it will never be over."

"Don't say that," begged Harry.

"It might be the truth." She said mournfully.

She moved quiet suddenly away from her brother and got off the sofa and went over to the window to stare out of it. She wished she had said no to them coming in. She couldn't handle seeing Harry when she was in such a state .

And it was so hard to be near him and not be intimate together now. It was as if when they were within touching distance of one another they were meant to be touching. And now.

Well she was not going to be like that with him when they were with her brothers. She could not be.

"Why are you being like this?" he said frustrated, his eyes scanned the faces of the adults. He was sure they all knew what was going on between the two of them and so he through caution to the wind and went to her side where he was needed. More now than he had ever been before.

"Please sweetheart." He muttered in her ear.

Turning to face him she looked so desolate and so hopeless. But somehow he had remained hopeful.

“I am so afraid.”

“I know you are. But we all love you. And you will pull through this,” he said reaching for her. They embraced but she did not hold him as intensely as usual. Whether that was because of the others or the attack he did not know.

When they drew apart she gave him a small smile but how shaken she remained was visible in her eyes.

“Your coming home sweetheart.” Aberforth said as he caught her eye. Every stiff thought through action she had made since she had woken up convinced him that he was right to remove her from Hogwarts.

“What?” her voice was lower than before and the shock entered her eyes,

“You need rest and peace and I am going to see that you get it. I am not taking no for an answer Ariana. You are going home. No arguments.”

Her eyes turned to Harry’s her face scanning his for his opinion on what her brother had just said to them both but what could he do but shrug he thought to himself. He had seen how she was and he agreed she was not herself.

“I’d pick your safety over your happiness any day of the week,” he shrugged though she could see that it pained him to admit that.

Her mind was racing in a way she was not used to any more. She was trying to find some order and pattern to her thoughts. But it wasn’t there.

Peace was going to be a good thing. When she felt better she could tell them what she thought – and it was a guarantee she would.

If Harry wasn't going to protest with her then she couldn't do it. Not on her own on that day. She felt mentally, physically and emotionally drained.

"I want to sleep," she admitted to them all.

"And you can darling but we have to know what happened to you first." said Aberforth. He needed to know who had done this to her.

Her eyes turned pleadingly to Harry. He nodded and as she went back to the sofa to sit down. He launched into the story of the last week and how Umbridge had been abusing the position of power that had been given to her. He recalled how Ariana had come back from the first detention but how the thought of a second one had agitated her all of the previous day.

Ariana had her head in her hands for the time he was telling the tale. She didn't want to hear what had happened to her again. It was bad enough that it had happened.

-

The fire at the Hogshead warmed the small living room as Aberforth lay his sister on the chair. She had washed and changed into her night gown. It had not hit her that she had left Hogwarts yet he thought to himself. When she did she was never going to forgive them. But it was for her own good. She hadn't said a lot since they had been back.

He sat by her for a while. She was lost in trying to think and she certainly wasn't sleeping, but it didn't look as if she had the energy for much else.

When ten o'clock rolled round he lifted her again and carried her to her room unaware they were being followed.

When they reached her room he laid her on the bed, kissed her good night and bid her sweet dreams.

“I don’t want to be alone tonight.” She admitted to the air when he was gone. That was when there was a rustling of material, and a beloved face appeared.

“Then you won’t be.” Harry told her.

Chapter 47

"Now you cannot come to me, I must come to you." He declared.

Ariana who had been feeling alone in a sea of people that day smiled at him tentatively. They were alone at last but together. It was all she wanted.

"My dear Harry."

Tears trickled once more.

"Don't cry darling, I'm here." He said closing the gap between the two of them at once. The divide had felt so great for the both of them at once. The gap which had felt so wide.

He wiped her tears from her cheeks and kissed them. It felt they had been apart for so long. As if it had not been days but years.

"Oh I love my sweetheart." She muttered making him chuckle.

"And I love my Ari."

"So much you don't want her with you all day?"

"So much that I want her safe." he replied as her hand caressed his chest softly.

She sighed. He knew she could not be content when she was not learning. But this was going to be a good thing for her, he knew it. And the more he thought on it the more what they had done that day made sense to him. They had all done the right thing when they had sent her home.

"It will not be for always my love. And we still have one another, don't we?" he asked her and she nodded passionately. They were always going to have one another.

"If you ever stopped loving me..."

He silenced her with a kiss. There was no point even discussing that. It was never going to happen.

Nodding, she understood what he was trying to tell her.

“You’ll stay tonight?”

“Every night, when you get here I will be too.” He promised her kissing her forehead.

“Aba?”

“He won’t catch us,” he said with more confidence than he felt. The fact she wanted to believe him made it so much easier to trust what he said. “You’re so tired.” He observed. She barely had the strength to keep her eyes opened but she didn’t want to sleep. Not when they were together in her room.

“No, no I’m not.” She shook her head.

“Yes Ariana. Sleep.” He urged her as he crawled under the blanket with her. Her old single bed was smaller than his at Hogwarts meaning there was even more intimacy between them than there had been previously. He was so close to her she could smell him.

Not wanting to fight what he was saying to her any more she lay her head on his chest. She could do with a light sleep she guessed. As long as he stayed.

As long as he was hers.

-

Sweetheart,

I had to go back to school. Didn’t want to wake you as you looked so peaceful.

I love you and shall be back tonight.

Harry.

It was hardly what she had wanted to wake up too. His arms she felt were a much better option. Still they could not have everything in life as she was learning. The fact that they had been together the night before she supposed was going to have to be enough for her. Till that evening.

Now she had a day of – nothing. No classes. No meals in the great hall. No seeing Sirius about or chatting with her friends.

Just as it had when she had first gone to Hogwarts. Her life had changed overnight. And this time she didn't think it was for the better.

How dare her brothers send her home for such a minor incident? When she had got upset the year before during the Triwizard Tournament they had not thought it was grounds for putting an end to the education she was so enjoying.

Going into the bathroom, she started running herself a bath. She felt she had to soak and she was not ready to go in to the living room to see Aberforth yet. She was feeling a lot clearer than she had been in a few days and she did not want to lose that by getting upset with him and then going back to square one.

Getting in to the tub she tried to picture what her life was going to be like from here on in. Was she just to wait for Harry to finish up for the next three years? Was she ever going to go back to school? There were so many unanswered questions. It was so unfair that she had gone so far and then it had come to this terribly bitter end.

Of course, if she looked at it from another view then she had gone further than she ever dreamed she would be able too. So maybe she should just be grateful for the time she had had at school. It had been very special to her.

And she now had memories no one could take from her.

Stepping out she knew she had to face the world sometimes. And she felt calmer now she had had the sometime to herself. She was ready to face her brother.

Brushing out her hair she tied only the top up so the rest of it flowed down her back. She had her white blouse on matched with her long blue skirt.

No more uniform.

Aberforth looked at her with concern when she finally emerged. He had hoped she was going to be out sooner but when she did come to him she appeared to be in good spirits thankfully.

"My darling good morning. You seem better today." He told her.

"I am. I feel much recovered."

"Well that I is grateful for. You had me scared for a moment." He said as she took her seat and he made tea for them both. "Do you want to talk about it?"

He asked. They both knew 'it' was her leaving school.

Yes and no she thought to herself. But then she didn't want to get herself all upset by it. And then she thought to herself in all seriousness what was the point? Until Umbridge was gone, she didn't really, desperately want to be there. And Harry thought it was best. And though she felt they had done it in a under hand way she knew her brothers wouldn't want to hurt her for the world. What they had done they had done because they thought it was the right thing to do.

"No." She shook her head surprising him. "I do feel angry about it. But it's done. And I need to keep calm. So can we please just have breakfast?" her words were collected but said in a coolness that had never been between them. She had spoke to Albus in such a way before but never him. He felt quite cut.

"Ok darling. I think that's a good idea."

But if he thought the normal warmth that flowed between the two of them was going to return in no time then he was sadly left disappointed. She was distanced from him, made little conversation and spent the majority of her time with the goats. They were apparently better company than he was.

Watching her he felt a pang of guilt. No matter how distance she was he was still glad that she had been restored to him at last. This was how it always should have been he thought to himself. Him and his darling sister. She was sure to come about to him in a few days he told himself. But it didn't stop the worry.

But the silence did not stop by the end of the day. She sat looking into the fire as if she was looking for answers when he checked up on her from the pub. Why had she got so upset she asked herself over and over again? The detention had been a terrible thing. No one could deny that. But she should have been strong enough to cope. And now she was ... here.

"You'll be ok sweet." She heard him tell her and she nodded. "You're so quiet today. Not like you at all."

"I have eaten and I am calm. Don't ask for conversation today Aberforth. It's too much." She said to him not taking her eyes off of the fire.

She knew it was the right thing and he had done it for the right reason but it did not mean the fact she was no longer at school did not hurt because it did. She had loved learning. And when she had done something right she had felt so proud of achievement. She had proved all the doubters wrong....

She longed for her bed – for Harry.

It didn't come soon enough. After dinner she excused herself to her room saying she wished to read which was true. She did. Pulling out Goodnight Mr Tom though she was reminded of her lessons with Albus. Time with him was going to be cut done she knew. She turned off the light and waited in the darkness.

At half ten she felt an arm slide about her waist and a pair of lips kiss her cheek in greeting.

Turning into him they lay there as if they had not moved from the previous night. It was as if the day was washed away. Just for a moment. But the truth was she felt lonely and lost.

“How was class?”

Harry winced at her tone. It was like that of a relation longing for someone they had lost. A child who had been separated from its best friend.

“Not nearly as fun without you there with me.” He said. He didn’t want to go into details. It was only going to serve to upset her and she had been upset enough he reminded himself. He knew she was unsatisfied with the answer but it was the only one she was getting.

She breathed evenly and stayed quiet. She had really very little to say to him that night. It was his soothing present she wanted, but not much more. She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t want to tell him how her day had been as she felt she had been rather pathetic through it and if she spoke of it then she was only going to cry.

Kissing her arm as they clung to one another, he savoured the time they had together. This was the best time of his day as well as the best of hers. He knew it had to be harder for her but it was not as if her leaving Hogwarts had not upset him. He had missed her and he was sure somewhere she knew that even if she did feel a little resentful of him.

Locked in one another’s love, the two teenagers feel asleep.

-

“What she is going to need if she is going to get through this is a bit of a project to occupy her time. She isn’t one for sitting about doing nothing. “

It was eleven and Sirius was at the Hogshead. He had had a feeling that Aberforth was going to need to talk after he had had her back for the first time. It was full time custardy now again. Aberforth for all the trials of the days was glowing. She was home and that was where she was going to be best loved and cared for.

He had to admit to himself that he was like Albus now. A few years ago he would not have appreciated the comparison but now he was making it. And with good reason. He was a selfish being. He would love and he would care for her selflessly but he was glad she was there by his side even if she was not so thrilled about it. Could she have survived the year at Hogwarts in her right mind?

Perhaps.

But her sanity was not something he could gamble with. Not when the stakes were so high now and they all knew just how high they were. Since her and Harry had been friends they had raised higher. He had got used to the Potter boy he thought to himself. But he didn't think he was ever going to really like him. Not when he was such a danger magnet. And he was always getting up to some sort of trouble. He liked Sirius. But then sometimes he got the feeling he didn't think that his sister was the best girl for his godson. And he agreed. She wasn't. They were in the same boat. Neither of them liked the two of them being together – but neither were going to tear them apart.

"You sound as if you have an idea," said Sirius as he nursed his fire whisky.

"I do. I think she is going to like it. What I need to do is bring her back out of her shell. When I have done that she is going to be ok." He told him.

"You sure?"

"Of course I am. I know her well enough to be the judge of that. She does go quiet when she gets upset and she has had a hard couple of days. The hardest she has had to live through in a long while in fact. She'll come round though. I just need to be patience."

-

"Sweetheart, come here!" Aberforth knew he had done the right thing. He had talked it over with Albus and he agreed it was a good idea.

Yes it was what she needed. And she was going to love it.

Ariana did as she was told. She had learnt that if she made no fuss about anything then they were not going to have any trouble. And what she was living for were the nights when she was reunited with her Harry.

"Aberforth, what is it?" she asked with her curious eyes.

"I have a gift for you."

"Why? It is not my birthday."

The Dumbledore children had never been spoilt and Kendra had made sure they knew that presents were only for Christmas or their birthdays. And she never had used presents as a bribe for good behaviour. He knew that she might not have approved of what she was doing. But she was not the one who was bringing up her daughter. He was.

"Do I really need a reason to dote upon my beloved sister?" he asked putting a tentative arm about her. She had been home a few day now and she had still not been that warm with him. She certainly had not invited any affection v between the two of them.

However as he stood there smiling at her she could not help but soften towards him. She had told herself repeatedly that he had taken her out of school because he had thought it was going to be the right thing for her and it was beginning to work.

She let him lead her out to the garden were she found a rather pleasant surprise.

Tied up on a new lease was a cocker spaniel puppy.

“She’s yours darling.” He told her.

Ariana looked at him with sheer delight. She had always, always loved animals. He didn’t know why he had not thought of it earlier. Even he had to admit the little puppy was pretty cute with her floppy ears.

She knelt to the floor and allowed it to jump up at her and lick her face. She laughed at its antics and a smile spread over her face and he knew for a moment she had forgotten what she had lost when she had left school.

“Oh Aba, thank you so much!”

She looked so happy in that moment. He delight as she looked at him warm every part of his old body.

Despite his old knees he knelt down by the top of them chuckling as the puppy greeted its new mistress for the first time.

“She is a happy addition to our little family is she not?”

“She’s wonderful. Oh brother thank you!”

He laughed at the as she stroked the puppy and made a fuss of her.

“You’ll have to name her.”

“I’ll have to think about it.”

“Of course.”

Ariana turned to her brother. He was so kind to her. And she knew she was not the best or the most gracious of sisters. When she hurt she took it out on him. But then he was always bouncing back trying to make her life just that little bit better.

“What can I do replay you?” she asked.

"You don't owe me anything sweetheart." He told her. "But I would be grateful to you if you would let me into that head of yours. Talk to me." He asked with pleading eyes. As she looked down her new puppy she sighed. What he asked was the one thing she was reluctant to give. But she did want to break the divide that had come between the two of them. She didn't like it when they fought.

"I get mixed up. I got upset. I didn't talk to you. But you didn't have to take me from my friends." There was she knew no consistence to what she said. But it all came out at once. She said to him. "You know if you had asked me on any other day then I would not have come home with you. You played on my weakness Aba. Why?"

"Because I have to keep you safe and well. I don't think you understand how much I need to do that for you." She looked at him with her big blue eyes which were confused. "You still don't get it do you? You still don't understand."

She shook her head.

"You are my baby sister – but you're my everything as well. I never got over you going. I can't lose you too any one." He said to her.

"You won't." She whispered.

"I could. I feel you slipping from me every time you leave my sight. You are my life and my happiness. You're the centre of everything."

"You have to trust that I am real and I am not going to disappear."

"I did for a time and look what happened to you. Umbridge." He growled. "No I can't give you up to people who will hurt you. I beg your forgiveness, but I'm not sorry for what I have done. I can't lose you."

When her head turned to him, she had tears in her eyes. He was the best of brothers. And she knew what he had done was because he thought it was for the best. He may have been wrong, but he didn't mean to be.

He didn't want to hurt her or to see her hurt.

"There is nothing to forgive." She would get used to life away from Hogwarts, as long as they had each other. He needed her. Her silly big brother who would fight her corner no matter what.

If he was protective, who could truly blame him?

"Hold me," she whispered.

The attacks, Voldemort, Umbridge. There was so much in the world she was not able to defend herself from. And so she must learn to rely on him. And whether she liked it or not that meant living with him and trusting him judgement.

Even when it went against what she truly wanted.

He enveloped her in his embrace and the two of them sat there with the new puppy for a long time.

Review Please!

Chapter 48

“Blossom, we cannot call her Blossom.”

“Well why can’t I? She is mine.”

“Yes I know she is darling but I am going to be looking after her as well. Let’s call her something else, please.”

Ariana looked at her puppy proudly she had had her now for five hours. The three of them had returned in side. Ariana had hardly stopped smiling. She had wanted something to do. And now she had it.

“Well then if you won’t let me call her blossom then I am going to call her Poppy.” She declared.

Aberforth despaired. She was clearly destined to have a very girly name.

“Very well,” he grumbled.

Aberforth had never thought his sister to be fickle but what he had done when he had brought Poppy into her life had been for the best he was soon to find out. She was soon back to the girl he had always known. But there was a brittle side to her now and he knew she was always going to regret not being allowed to complete Hogwarts. And yes, maybe she was always going to blame him for that. But he had done it because it was for the best.

Weeks passed as September flew into October. Jumpers reappeared in Hogsmeade village. She was going to miss summer she thought to herself.

“Can I help you tonight?” she asked as she went down the wooden stairs into the bar. Aberforth looked at her. Poppy and reading filled much of her day but not all of it. And he found her more restless than she had once been. He knew why of course. She remained at times bored.

“Don’t you want to be reading?” he asked her. Lately she had become as devoted to her books as Albus had been at her age.

She shook her head.

“Alright then. You can’t serve but you can collect the empties for me.”

She nodded and set to work. It was something to do at least she thought to herself. But what might she be doing if she were still in the Gryffindor tower? Her heart sank as it always did. But she did as she was told. Going on and on about things rarely made them come true – she had learnt that. She had to forget the past and move on.

There was relatively little trade that evening. The pub was never packed but it seemed to her it was particularly quiet that night.

There was however a familiar face she thought with a small giggle. Evie McCardle. She had met her for the first time the previous summer. And she had noticed that she was often in. And when she was she only had eyes for Aberforth.

Unfortunately for poor Evie, Ariana knew that she repulsed poor Aberforth. He hated that she was always in and she was always making eyes at him. And she was making eyes at him even as Ariana collected the empties.

Throwing a smile over her shoulder to her brother that turned in to a giggle, she watched as he scowled.

Oh, her poor big brother.

“She likes you.” Ariana whispered as she returned to the bar.

“I am well aware of that fact.”

The look on his face was classic Aberforth she thought to herself. That face that was so dear to her that said ‘go away or I am not going to like you any more’. He had perfected it when they had been young.

“But I might like a new sister.” She teased him.

An even deeper scowl. Knowing her work was down she wondered off round the pub doing what she had been told.

Aberforth risked a look over at Evie. She gave him a wink that made him want to wince.

How long was it till closing again?

-

Harry found Ariana much improved then she had been when she had first got to her brothers. Each day he was that bit happier because she was just a bit better.

He got to bed before her that evening, he had seen her working with her brother when he had snuck in and up the stairs to her room.

“Hello,” she said as she bounded into bed with a smile on her face. He remanded the best thing that had ever happened to her she thought to herself happily. There was nothing in the world that could change that.

Harry had had a rough day. He had earned himself a detention with Umbridge finally and he had to say he full intended to wind her up all the way through it. It was going to be fun. So while it was rough it wasn't that bad. And when he saw she was in such a good mood he was delighted. She was as she always had been.

“Hello you,” he said as she cuddled up next to him. Cupping her cheek he kissed her. She pressed back firmly and intensely. She was in a very good mood he thought to herself. Moving his other hand to the small of her back he arched over her as they kissed.

She was indeed heavenly that night he mused.

“Missed you.” She muttered between kisses. It had only been that morning when they had seen one another but he knew what she meant. He had missed her too. Possibly he only realized how much he really missed her when they were reunited.

"Oh me too," he nodded as they finally broke apart and laid back into the pillows.

"Your happy." He observed.

"Pretty much." She nodded and he felt more contented than he had in a while for her. He had been worried for a while she was never going to regain her sunny confidence. But she had.

"How was school?" she asked. It hurt less to know what he had been doing now that she had got used to the fact Hogwarts was just not part of her life any longer.

"It wasn't too bad." But when he looked at her he knew he had not been very convincing. "Don't shout at me." He pleaded. "I got a detention with Umbridge today."

She sighed in a manner which told him she had been waiting for this for a while. In no way was she surprised.

"Oh Harry." She said to him but she did not rebuke him. She knew what she was like and Harry had probably done nothing wrong though she did wish he had kept out of her way. But he was a magnet for trouble.

"You are not angry?" he checked.

"It's not your fault." She said to him.

"You don't even know how I got it." He reminded her.

"I know if it is that cow giving out the detention then it is likely not to be your fault." She said to him confidently. She had every faith in him and she knew what that damn woman was like.

He nodded glad he had not upset her as he had feared the information might and laid back again so that he could hold her both comfortably and closely.

"I'm never going to stop you know." He whispered to her.

"Stop what?"

"Being thankful that I found you." Looking up into his eyes she felt herself blush. It was not a habit of her but the rush of blood to her cheeks made her seem sweeter than ever to him. She looked like a rose in full blossom he thought to himself.

"And me neither. I meant what I said to you in the summer you know. You keep me sane. And you're my dearest," she said as she kissed him once again.

Oh kissing her was getting harder he thought to himself. It wasn't that she was not enough for him or that the way that they were together was not enough. But when they were in bed together... And they were practically skin on skin any way he found it hard to control himself. She was so wonderful. He wanted to caress her, every part of her.

Pulling away before he let his thoughts get the better of him he smiled at her.

"What is it?" she questioned him.

"Nothing Ari." He said as he tucked her hair behind her ear. "Nothing."

-

Every other Saturday. That was it. That was all he got with her now thought Albus miserably. It wasn't nearly enough time. They were still building a bond that they had never had before he reminded himself. It just was not enough. But between everything else, it was all they had.

And so his time with her became the high light of his fought night. It was the reason that he stuck up with Umbridge, the reason he kept the order going, why he kept working, because he had to keep her safe if he did nothing else.

When she came into the office to see him that week she had a smile on her face. She was still reminiscing about the kisses she had shared with Harry the night before which she had begun to think about on the way up to see him. She had to say she felt satisfied and loved. It was all she ever wanted.

Well, Aberforth he had to admit had been right about one thing. Now she did not have to contend with the added pressure of going to class she was a lot more relaxed and as a result they did not have to worry about her magic half as much. When she was calm she could control it. He was still trying to figure out a way to get her to control when she was not without distressing her unnecessarily.

He couldn't help but feel in some way her had let her down again.

She stood in his office looking put of the window.

"You must be looking forward to the Hogsmeade visit next weekend." He said as he poured her tea. "I expect you have missed your friends." It went unsaid that he meant Harry.

"Yes I have," she said to him. She had missed Neville, Ron, Hermione and the twins. It didn't matter that hadn't taken the question as it was meant she thought to herself. But she could not tell her brother she had been having Harry in her room every night either.

"How's Aberforth?" he asked.

"His well, looking after me well too. Very protective, but I suppose that is just the way he is – the way you both are." She shrugged.

"We're your big brothers. We have every right to be." He chuckled.

"I know." She nodded, but there was something sad about her suddenly. As she raised her eyes to his he knew what it was. The same thing that made him sad.

"I miss teaching you Ariana." He agreed.

"I never get to see you anymore." She complained.

"I am sorry. And I do try to make all the time I can for us. But there is not enough time in the day." She knew that. And she also knew that she should not complain. But she couldn't help it.

"I know. And I shouldn't moan. But – your one of the most important people in my life and worry about you. You didn't look well at the end of the summer and I want to look after you, like you do for me."

Touched by her words, the sentimental old man walked about the table and took her hands.

"When you talk like that, Ariana fades away into Kendra, you know that don't you?" he said knowing she thought that was the greatest compliment someone could give to another person. Their mother had turned into the untouchable saint in her eyes.

Looking at him she felt her heart swell. One day she was going to be like she had been – beautiful and wise.

Kissing her forehead he knew he loved her more than he ever had before. More than he had the day before, but not quite as much he was going to love her tomorrow.

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"I missed you so, so much!" said Ariana as she came down the stairs. She hated putting on this show for Aberforth. But it had to be done.

Harry had known this was coming turned to the stairs where she run down to met him. They had to make it seem to her brother as if they had been apart for weeks even if they had not been.

Sweeping her up into his arms, he turned her about as she embraced him lovingly.

"I missed you as well!" he said as he put her down.

"Aba we are going to go out for a bit is that ok?" she asked over her shoulder, though she already had her bag and coat on. She was

eager for them to get out. It wasn't Harry who she felt she had to talk to that day but someone they were going to met.

"Go on then, I'll watch Poppy for you." He nodded. The little dog had come out after her mistress and Ariana stroked her affectionately before turning, taking Harry's hand and exiting the pub with him.

"All I ever seem to do is lie to Aberforth these days." She said miserably.

"I know but it is the only way we get to see one another on a daily basis, isn't it?" he said wrapping his arm protectively about her.

"I know but I still don't like it." She shrugged.

They walked into the Three Broomsticks together and by that time she had put her guilt to the back of her mind, she had a happy reunion to have.

She may still get to see Harry every day but she didn't see any of her other friends anymore and when she met up with them all it struck her once again what a blow it had been to her when she had left school. It was the people she missed desperately, not the building.

Hermione took up the stall next to her which she was grateful for as she had a few questions for her. There had been playing on her mind for a few days and she felt Hermione was the only one who could help her. It wasn't as if she could go to her brothers.

Not over something like this.

"Hermione you know what has come to pass between me and Harry in the past few weeks I think." She began once the others had become engaged in their own conversation.

"That he comes to you, yes I do." she nodded, not seeing where this was going.

"Well he has become so dear to me that I cannot tell you how I feel for him. But when we are in bed together at times I feel like he wants

more from me than kissing. I know there is more to the physical side between a man and a woman than just kissing. Can you explain? I hate to ask but there is no one else I can go to.”

She looked at her for a moment as if unsure what to make of this request. Up until this point Hermione had always seen Ariana as a good Victorian girl. But she supposed between her love for Harry and her new life in a new time frame she had become a different girl from who she might have been had she been allowed to develop normally in her own time. And she seemed so in control of what she was saying and doing.”Why don’t we go somewhere a bit more private?” suggested Hermione and the two got up. Harry looked at her curiously.

“A bit of a girly chat is needed, we won’t be long.”

Ariana nodded. She had to hear this. She had to know.

-

Ariana looked at Harry as he slept. She was normally the first to sleep out of the two of them but she couldn’t that night. She had too much on her mind.

She had sex on her mind.

It was an odd concept to get her head round but the more she thought about it the more she thought it was just how Hermione had described it to her. A natural act between a man and a woman who loved one another, for that was what they were.

Caressing his beloved face with her hand she swept a piece of his unruly hair out of his face. Sex, was that what he craved from her?

Was that what she wanted from him?

She knew she didn’t have to answer any of the questions she was asking herself that evening. They had all the time in the world together.

But one day soon, she thought maybe they were going to be ready for, sex, dare she think it.

“I love you dearly my darling,” she said kissing his forehead. Then, rolling around she turned into the moonlight and considered all that she had heard that day.

She only hoped that she might make the right choice.

A/n: Please Review!

Chapter 49

"Come on you," said Ariana as she picked up Poppy's lead. They were off for a walk. It was mid day of a mid week afternoon. She had a lot on her mind and she had to get out. Besides she knew her way about Hogsmeade perfectly well by herself now. She could go alone.

Poppy jumped up, excited and barked. The two walked down the stairs into the bar, Ariana wrapped in a big jumper to keep out the cold.

"See you soon darling," said Aberforth as he watched her exit. She had been acting weird lately. Even more so than normal. She would come to him when she was ready and not before though.

"Yup." She said with a smile.

She walked out of the village and straight out to the fields. It was a place she had become rather familiar with since she had Poppy. They often walked out this way together. The excited puppy pulled on her lead by Ari didn't go any faster. She wanted the time to think over well everything.

Everything was so different to how it was.

She tried to think back to how things had been when she was ill. But she couldn't. There were only sketches of time. Images of a nightmare.

On each side of that there were moments of happiness from a happy childhood and her time at Hogwarts. In between there was very little. And she wished there was. She felt as if she had been denied the childhood she would have loved to have enjoyed. And to have been a child... had she ever been a child? Yes she knew she had always been childlike, she had needed the same things as other children but she wasn't sure she had ever been a child in the truest sense of the word. And now here she was.

About to make the most adult choice of her life so far.

When she looked back on her time with Harry she knew she had no regrets. They hadn't wasted a moment. And the times when they had been together and they had not been touching were because they had needed to get to know each other, or they knew the other one needed time out.

She thought back to the day when she had told him that she was going to be starting school and that she had been scared because she had not had her mother there to help her make the choice. She missed her still and always was going too. But she didn't need her there to tell her what to do anymore. She had her own life. And she used her own mind. And things were never going to be as they were.

But was that so bad?

She sometimes spent so much time thinking on the past, she mused, that she might forget to live. Didn't every one's lives change?

Ages. The years that go past. The people we love, those we hate. Didn't they all change? Who we knew.

Who we lose.

Why were the changes in her life so special? What made her pain any different?

Her thoughts turned back to Harry. Sex. She wanted him in new ways she now knew. Things were different.

She was different. She wasn't scared. She was thrilled at the idea of them being so intimate with one another. It was going to bring them together in ways she didn't know before.

She was sure of it.

But she wanted it to be special. And it certainly wasn't going to be that evening. But soon... soon she planned to surrender herself to him entirely.

It was then that her deep contemplation was interrupted by a park. Only it was not Poppy. It was another dog. She knew it though.

But he wasn't there.... he wasn't at Hogwarts ... unless...

The dogs master came up behind him and a huge smile spread across Ariana's face and relief swept her heart. There was a certain kind of warmth that only a familiar face of an old friend could bring to her.

"Hagrid..." she whispered in a tone of joyous unbelief. The size of the man who was moving towards her made it impossible for it to be any one else so close to Hogwarts. It could only be him. He had Fang with him. But when she saw his face clearly her heart lurched. He was battered and bruised. He had been hurt. "Hagrid!" she cried this time louder.

"Well if it isn't 'ur Miss Ariana." He beamed. It was so good to see her. He had been told by Hermione, Ron and Harry when he had seen them that morning that Ariana had left the school. She seemed pretty well on first glance he thought to himself.

Running into his arms she was sure to keep hold of Poppy's lead but threw herself into the giants embrace which were wide open and very willing to receive his young friend who he had missed so much in the time that he had been away. He had not forgotten those who had been waiting for him to return, and his young friends certainly had been.

When she drew back he noticed there was something different about her. She was not so young and in subtle ways she had indeed grown since he had been gone, yet her eyes told him she was still the Ari who he had so loved teaching. She had matured somehow.

"I missed you so much and am so glad your back, Hagrid but....your hurt." She said as her eyes traced the bruises which smothered what must have been his aching face. "Are you ok?"

He nodded. He didn't want her to make a fuss over him. The bruises were necessary if he was going to keep his brother safe. Aberforth

would understand he thought to himself. He would do anything for his little sibling as well. But Ariana... would she understand? Was it safe for her to know?

"Don't worry; really, I'm fine," he insisted but he knew she was not convinced. She was wearing the same look Hermione had had on her face when he had told her he was fine.

"How can you be?" she asked. The thought of anyone hurting someone she loved hurt her.

"Please Ariana, really," he insisted once more. She didn't know what she might be able to argue to make him tell the truth. Her eyes seemed particularly expressive that day and they bore into him as they asked the question that was itching to get on to her tongue and out of her lips – who has done this to you?

She did not respond.

"Come back to the pub," she urged him. "Aberforth would love to see you I know he would," she said to him. And he was far more likely to get the truth out of him than she was.

"Ok," he said. He knew she was only worrying because she cared.

The walk back to the Hogshead after their warm reunion was rather stiff, which was not like them she thought to herself. They had never had an awkward silence between them to contend with before but she didn't know how to break it.

Aberforth when he saw his friend was also duly concerned about him.

"Ari love why don't you go on upstairs?" he quickly made the suggestion.

She hated to be treated like a child but she knew Hagrid was never going to say anything with her there and so offering a shy smile she did as she was told and climbed the stairs.

Letting Poppy off her lease when they were back in the flat she sat down on the sofa and worried. She knew Hagrid had been out of the country on an order mission. So what on that mission had hurt him so badly?

Downstairs meanwhile Hagrid recounted to Aberforth what he had been through over the past six months as he had tried to get Grawp back to the castle and into the forest.

"I couldn't just leave him there."

"Of course you couldn't, he had to be brought back so you could take care of him."

If anyone could understand the love an elder sibling had for the younger, it was him.

-

"Is he ok?" said Ariana quickly as Aberforth came up. It was nine o'clock and he had got into the habit of coming up about this time to check on her. In fact he normally checked in on her more than one time in a night but he had got so engrossed in his conversation with Hagrid he could not leave.

"Yes my dear, he's fine. It is nothing for you to worry about." He knew she was going to be left quite unsatisfied by that answer but he could not help that. He had said to his friend he was not going to tell and so he wasn't. "I am sorry I left you for so long today up here, but we got talking. Did you get yourself some dinner?" he asked.

She shook her head. She had been busying thinking about what they were talking about that dinner had gone quiet out of her head.

"Oh Ariana, what am I ever going to do with you girl? If your head wasn't screw on I am sure that you would lose it." He said to her and she shrugged as a way of giving an apology.

"Tea and toast do you for tonight. I fancy it has got so late that you don't really want anything do you?"

“Not particularly.” She shrugged. She’d rather go to bed and wait for Harry.

“Well you have to have something.” He said to her. It was more out of habit than anything else he made her eat now she thought to herself.

“Some of your big brothers special tea and toast then?” he said and she nodded. Brushing his lips across her forehead, he smiled. He liked to feel needed.

“I am going to go and get my pyjamas on.” She said as she turned to the hall way that lead to her room. She considered trying once more to get whatever Hagrid had said to him out of him. But she knew what Aberforth was like. Loyal to the last. And if he had said he was not going to tell her then he was not going to tell her.

“Go on then my lass, it is going to be ready in a moment.”

-

Harry awoke with a start. He knew it was not morning yet, how could it be. But he was wide awake. He wasn’t the only one. “Did I keep you awake?” he asked.

“No.”

“Liar.”

She gave a soft chuckle but in truth she was concerned for him. He had not stopped tossing and turning ever since her had got in that night. Even if she had wanted to sleep his constant fidgeting would have prevented her. But she had stayed up running her fingers through his hair trying to soothe him. To no avail. She had been rather worried that if he had been any louder that he was going to wake Aberforth. They had been lucky so far that he had not caught them.

“What were you dreaming about? Was it the corridors again?”

“Of course it was.”

Taking her hand he kissed it tenderly. She was so good to him, staying awake with worry like this. His eyes traced her face.

“I don’t have to come if you don’t want me too – if I am keeping you up.” He offered.

“Don’t be stupid. I really wouldn’t get any sleep if you were not here with me.” She said. She didn’t know how she would feel if he were not there. If he was not there to keep her safe and to love her. It was a terrible thought. He watched as her expression of concerned turned to grief and sorrow.

“I didn’t mean it love. If you want me here then you know as well as I do that I am always going to be here.” He reminded her.

She nodded. There were moments when she had to ask if they were real. “Come here,” he said as he took her back into his arms. He wasn’t sure if he was going to get back to sleep but he wanted to hold her close if he was not going too. Kissing the top of her head he let his eyes wonder to the window. He thought about nothing in particular but there was a fear in his heart and he found himself quite restless for the rest of the night.

November when it came brought no relief to the couple. Harry was banned from playing Quidditch after he got into an argument with Malfoy. Albus was busier than ever as he tried to keep the Order going and his place at the school. During all this there seemed to be little Ariana could do to help any of the men in her life. All she could do was be there and hope in some way she was helping, whether she knew it or not.

However just because he was stressed, it did not mean that Harry became less ardent in his affection. If anything it only served to heighten it. There were moments when they were in bed together when she sensed all he wanted to do was what Hermione had explained to her about – entering her.

There were moments when she almost allowed him but for some reason he never quite did it. He always pulled back.

In truth he felt it was disrespectful in a weird way. The two of them had never been about what was physically between them and now he wanted to do was ...

Ariana had almost a couple of times tried to talk about this with him, if he wanted to do it – but it was obvious he did.

So there was only one thing left to do. Make it obvious to him that she was as desperate for him as he was for her. Make sure he knew that she was no longer as Victorian in her morals as they all thought she was.

It was then that a plot hatched in her mind how to do this.

Chapter 50

"I really cannot thank you enough for this Hermione." Said Ariana. The second visit into the Hogwarts term had come as Christmas dawned and since the last one the two girls had been in constant correspondence. It was natural as Hermione was the only person Ariana was truly able to confide in such a manner.

"It's ok," said Hermione. In truth she was rather enjoying it. Ariana had a way of making everything seem most romantic and she was so sure that the two of them were in love. They were so... old fashioned.

Or they had been.

"Are you sure that going to the Room of Requirement is the right place though. I mean for the whole night. I just think it's risky." Said Hermione.

"I know but I cannot do it under Aberforth's roof it is too disrespectful," Ariana sighed. She was not going to do this to her brother. He was going to be so sad when he found out what she had done. To him she knew she was still a baby. But she felt like a woman. "And I think it somehow worth the risk."

The plan was for her to go up to Hogwarts for the night, just before term came to a close. Hermione would get Harry to the Room of Requirement somehow. It could be on Defence business or something. Then she would be waiting...

But how to doge her brothers?

More lies and deception? It was the only way. She couldn't very well tell them the truth.

Tell Al nothing so he thought it was just another night. Tell Aba she was with Al for the night. It was the only way.

Later that evening she lay awake watching Harry sleep. He was truly the best thing that had ever happened to her.

-

Weeks passed and even though life seemed to bring little relief to Harry, she knew that he was going to make it through what ever came. The difference between the two of them was he had strength to continue through anything. She had not been tested yet and she didn't know if she would face it as well as he did.

But they were going to be closer than they ever had been before – that very night. Time had passed slowly as the day loomed and then on the day itself it seemed to fly by.

Before she knew it, it was six o'clock. She had told Aberforth the night before she was going to spend the night with Albus. She knew there was a risk that they would talk and then she was going to be discovered, but her and Harry were worth the risk.

Packing her bag, she put in the new night gown her and Hermione had picked out together. It was not what Harry was used to seeing her in she thought to herself.

How different tonight was going to be to all the others.

Once she had out her toothbrush in her bag she looked about her room. She had a fresh dress and fresh underwear for tomorrow. Yes she was ready to go to him.

Stroking Poppy gently, she left her in the flat and headed down stairs. The strangest feeling came over her.

It was as if she was seeing everything for the final time.

Aberforth smiled at her as she came into sight. "I know your game!"

"W – what? What game?" she said her heart rose in her chest.

"Trying to go off to Al's without saying goodbye were you?"

"Course not." She said with a shrug.

“Alright sis I was only kidding with you.” he said as he wondered over and gave her a paternal kiss on the forehead. “Have a good night. What time do you think you’ll be back in the morning?” she asked.

“Some time after breakfast I expect. I might go and see Harry for a while.”

“I thought you might. You two have handled you being here really well, you know that don’t you kid?”

She nodded, eager to get out.

“Right then sweetie, have a good night.”

“I will do.” She said as she headed to the door. Just as she opened it, she turned back to him. “I love you Aba.”

“Some one has too.” He nodded in reply.

-

Hermione was there for her when she arrived at the gates already. Thank god she had the clock with her. “Get under this,” she muttered quickly and threw it over her. No one who didn’t have to could know she was here.

The two walked through the busy castle, Hermione leading and Ariana keeping pace with her. A good Christmas spirit had come over the snow covered castle. The last day of classes was always a day of celebration. It made Ariana feel nostalgic as she remembered her own last days of term and the sense of pride she had in them when she knew she had survived another whole term and she had progressed further.

The two walked up to the Room of Requirement, and after several mishaps with changing stair cases (which only added to Ariana’s nerves) they made it.

Turning to her friend she gave her an uneasy grin. "I don't know how to thank you – for everything Hermione, that you have done for me over the last few weeks," Ariana begun.

"There's no need Ariana. It's been a pleasure. And I know how happy you make Harry – and how happy he makes you," she said. "You're two halves of whole. Anyone can see it."

"You think so?"

"I know so." She said as the two friends gave one another a meaningful look. "Now, how long do you need to prepare yourself?" she asked.

"Twenty minutes."

"I suppose you don't want me to come in."

"No thanks. I think I can take it from here."

-

Ariana looked about the room. This was how she wanted it, how she had been imagining it for weeks.

The four poster king sized bed was in the middle of the room. Roses crept up round the posts and the scene of the flowers filled the air. There was no duvet on the bed, just a thin white sheet, which was more appropriate for summer than this time of year and yet it felt unseasonably warm. Candles lit the room gentle, which apart from them was left unlit.

The girl who stared back at her from her reflection in the mirror was unknowable. She had a gown on, not that kept her warm, but she hoped would encourage Harry. It was the lowest cut garment she had ever won, and though it covered up her whole body, the silk material meant it had a very different feel to the cotton she was used to. Though it was light, it had the effect of making her stand tall and it was undeniably a woman who looked back at her. She wasn't a little girl any more.

It was then that the door crept open.

“Ron?” asked Harry.

“Not quite.” Came the reply.

Harry looked at Ariana speechlessly. It was obvious he had no idea what she had been up to for the past few weeks.

“Merry Christmas baby.” She said as she wondered over to him. Powerless to do anything else, he allowed his hands to settle on her hips. She was so ...

He didn't have much time to think, even though the first kiss she planted upon his lips came tentatively.

Drawing back for a split second, he took another chance to drink her in and ask the only question going through his mind. “You're sure?”

“Yes. I want you.”

He needed to be told no more and the fantasy's which for weeks, months had been going about in his head became a wonderful reality. She felt better than he had thought she would, she tasted fresher. Harry kissed her lips, her nose, forehead, cheeks, ears, neck. Working her way down her body, he barely registered as she pulled his shirt off and through it to the floor.

Pushing her back on to the bed, he pulled down the fragile gown and allowed it to fall so that the top rested on her hips. She was utterly revealed to him for the first time. He stopped for a moment to take her in.

“This is it,” he whispered in her ear. “We'll never be here again. Never get this night again,” he told her seriously as he kissed her forehead. “You have to be sure.” He muttered.

Looking into her face he saw she had become utterly flushed, but her cheeks were wet with happy, joyful tears. She was radiated, excited,

and passionate. "Do it." She pleaded with him. She had been ready for this for what felt an age. "I am sure."

-

Harry awoke to find his arm still draped over Ariana's body. They hadn't got under the sheet, and the two lay on the top of the bed utterly naked. She sleep as the sun rose on her face, but it didn't seem too disturbed her he noted. They had had a peaceful night when they had fallen to sleep. No bad dreams.

Even though he felt cruel waking her, he wanted her to open her beautiful eyes and greet him. He wanted all of her all over again. It was crazy, but he felt different to the Harry Potter who had walked into the Room of Requirement the night before. He felt different all over.

Kissing her shoulder, he pulled her into him and she stirred. Her eyes fluttered open, and though she was obviously confused as to where she was at first, he was glad he was looking over her to see the recognition of the previous night's events on her face.

"Oh wow," she muttered as she run her hand over her face and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. "Oh boy. We actually did that didn't we?"

"I rather think we did Miss Dumbledore." He said as she curled into him.

"Mhmm." She said as she rested her head on her chest. "Hi." She said in a playful tone, and though it made no sense in the conversation at that time, it seemed to make sense to him.

"Good morning Ari." He muttered as he kissed her forehead. He didn't care about time, space or the universe any more. Let them find someone else to kill Voldemort and destroy evil. He was pretty sure the only thing that mattered was the girl who lay in his arms. She was so warm and alive.

“Two halves of a whole.” She muttered into him. She understood what Hermione had meant now. The peace that over took the pair of them was indescribable. It was as if they had – she didn’t know, she couldn’t put it in to words. It wasn’t love any more – it was stronger.

He didn’t ask what she had said. He simply silently agreed. They were two halves of a whole, and they were always going to be.

But the world wasn’t going to wait for them he thought as time and space came back to haunt him. And if he knew one other thing in the world apart from the fact she had come to him the night before, it was that whatever she had told her ultra protective big brother, it was not that she was off to lose her virginity.

“How long do we have?”

“Till eleven or so and then Aberforth is going to send out a search party no doubt,” she muttered but she didn’t want to talk about that. She did not want to break the mood.

“We don’t have to get up yet,” he said. Checking his watch he saw it was nine. Early yet.

His hands remained on her lower back as they talked her head on his chest and her hand on his shoulder. The Quidditch had paid off.

“You remember we said we were going to go away together one day? Just us?” she asked.

“Yup.”

“Tell me how it’s going to be...”

He paused for a minute, trying to act as if he hadn’t thought time and time again about the day they were going to go off into the sunset together. But the fact was that he had thought about it time and time again.

“We are going to go off to another country. Maybe France or Italy. Or maybe just go over to Ireland. And we’re going to find a cottage and it

is going to have a thatched roof, like in the old fashioned books and films, and a little garden. And I'll take you to the beach, and into the woods. And we can read, and play, and spend time together. We'll cook meals together and then lit a fire. And at night – like this baby. It's going to be just like this. What do you say to that?"

"That I think I want you to take me away right now."

-

Looking back I wished I had – that I had taken her and run far, till my legs wouldn't carry us any further. Or that I hadn't let her leave the room. She had been so utterly perfect. Our time together that night was idyllic. I had been right, we were never going to get that night back, and we were never going to be so close again.

I loved her, and I still love her. Everything she ever gave me enriched my life. But our dream died that day.

-

"I have to go," Ariana laughed. Having redressed by ten thirty, she turned to Harry. He was everything. "I'll see you tonight?"

"Of course," Harry nodded as he cupped her cheek and kissed her deeply.

-

One last kiss to sustain me. I would not see her that night.

-

Ariana felt she was in a dream. Her plan had come together. Walking through the corridors she knew she was not ready to return to face Aberforth. No she would go to Albus and see him. She would say she had come from the pub. Her bag she was going to explain away. She didn't how – but neither did she care.

Going up the stairs she looked into her brother's office.

She did not see him but on his desk there was – a stone bowl, was the best way she could describe it. It had mystic runes over it. What was inside was a substance that she saw as she edge neither could neither accurately be described as a liquid or a gas.

“What is it?” she asked one of the portraits.

“Memories my girl,” one responded.

“Memories...” she murmured, and before she knew it she had been sucked into them.

Chapter 51

Whatever Ariana had been prepared for, it was not what she saw next. She had been transported it seemed back in time. Albus she could see standing by the door frame of her old bedroom which she had had when they had lived at home with their parents. She was on the bed, crying out in agony. She knew where she was, when this was.

The night of her attack.

“Oh, what have they done to you my beautiful Ariana?” her father wept over her body. He was there and in that moment he was so real to her again.

Ariana felt her eyes fill with tears as Aberforth entered the room. There they were all five of them together. So they had been once. She had been beginning to doubt they had ever been a family.

But the one she was focusing on was, of course, her mother who she had longed for since she had arrived at Hogwarts. The expression she wore was that of a woman broken by her loss

“Talk to me baby, tell me what has happened? Angel please...” Percival begged her.

“Boys I don’t want you to see this, can you leave me and father with your sister for a moment please,” asked Kendra but as she could have predicted neither of them moved, they just stood there waiting for a sign that she was ok.

“I know you’re scared but Papa isn’t angry with you.”

Oh her papa... Ariana let a tear slide down her cheek. All memories of that blissful night she had just had with Harry left her. The only people who mattered in the whole world were the people who had been with her in that moment. She was there but she did not remember this awful scene. She couldn’t remember her father and mother being so destroyed by what had happened to her.

After a while with her being so unresponsive though her father seemed to give up on trying to talk to her. He let his face set and he kissed her forehead.

That was the last time he had ever kissed her - she knew it in her heart. She had watched herself say goodbye to him. Forever...

"I don't want you to go," she whispered. "Papa stay!" But her younger self continued to cry and did nothing to stop him.

She watched as he ruffled the boy's hair and kissed her mother. "I love you, my cherished and wonderful family." He said as he left the room. He wasn't coming back.

The memory changed.

She was downstairs in the kitchen but she could not see her younger self. Only her mother with her two brothers.

"Boys I am so sorry to do this to you. To you both. But you know we cannot stay here. If she is found in the state she is in they are going to take her away from us and I have already lost your father. I cannot lose your little sister too."

Her hands which had been on the table were grabbed by Aberforth who looked up her and nodded with a clear understanding of the situation.

"We know mother and it doesn't matter. As long as the four of us are together and Ariana is kept calm then we are going to get through this." He said to her with the resistance to the situation that only Aberforth could ever muster. It hit her in that moment how brave he had been when he had been so young. He had been a boy. A child. And yet he had always fought for her.

"Al? What about you sweetheart?"

She had always known that out of the three siblings he had been the one who had found the brake up of their family the hardest to deal with.

At that moment it did not seem he could even speak. The loss he was feeling was probably too great and Ariana genuinely felt that she understood what he was going through. As she watched the destruction of the Dumbledores she felt it too. She did not know how she would have coped if she had been able to understand what had happened to all of them. They had always been together. They had always been such a loving family. She didn't know why her father had had to walk out of that door. If he had only stayed with his wife and children then things could have been so different for all of them.

"I have studying to do," he said and excused himself from the table. She supposed she should have seen that coming. From what Aberforth had said to her about Albus when they were young whenever he had found something difficult he had retreated to the safety of his text books. Theories weren't going to go mad and they were not going to cause his heart to break. If there was a logical answer then he could deal with it. When there was emotion involved he was had to run as fast as he could away from it.

The memory changed once more.

"You are so selfish!" Aberforth berated Albus. He had obviously just followed him up to his room. He had tears of grief rolling down his cheeks.

"Dad is gone and Ariana might never get better. Mamma needs us now! You can't run away forever Albus!" he said to him.

And he hadn't thought Ariana. In the end he had been there for her when it had counted. He had been a good brother. The past didn't matter. Not now.

The memory turned again and she was following Albus up the staircase. They were in their second 'family' home.

"Mamma what is it? Is she ok?" she heard him call but there was someone shouting louder at the top of the stairs. To her shame it was herself. She was having one of her fits. She watched as the colours came out of her that she had only seen so vaguely before. She had

never wanted to see this from an outsiders perspective but to her shock she found it not so distressing as strangely fascinating to see what her body was doing and what she was going through. It did not look as bad as it felt she thought to herself. It felt much worse.

“My darling, calm down!” said her mother to her and Kendra tried to approach her.

“I can’t,” she wept on the floor but there was an almighty flash and it did scare her sixteen year old self. As she watched the events she had been filled with a sense of dread. When she looked back, she looked at her mother’s body lying in the ground.

“Mother!” cried Albus as he knelt by her.

“Wake up!” Ariana wept. “Wake up!” She had to wake up, she couldn’t be...

“MOTHER!” cried Albus as he find to find a pulse. They were both ignoring her fourteen year old self. All that mattered was that Kendra woke up!

“Come on!” said Albus as his voice broke. After two minutes though his face conveyed to his sister what she had done. Cradling their mothers corpse, he cried. “She’s gone – she’s dead...”

-

“Well Minerva are you looking forward to the Christmas holiday?” the headmaster asked his deputy.

“Very much Albus, though I do not know how much rest any of us are going to get in the break we deserve.” She said to him and he had to say he quite agreed. It was going to be another Christmas where he divided his time between his duty to the Order and his love for his family. He would see his siblings though he was sure of it. He would make the time to go and see them.

“Quite though I fancy the feel of the season is going to be enough to give me a rest this year.” He had always loved the festive season

since he had been head master. The students who stayed for the holidays seemed to give the feast a family like atmosphere as they all gathered about one table and told each other what they had been given.

No, he loved Christmas.

It was at that moment though he heard an almighty bang.

"God heavens, what was that?" he heard McGonagall say beside him.

"It sounds as if a bomb has been set off in the school!" offered one of the muggle born students close to the staff table.

But it wasn't that. He was sure of it – oh god, please let him be wrong. But in the past year he had built up a sixth sense when it came to her. Please let him be wrong!

Everyone was sitting there trying to figure out what it was when Sirius Black came running in to the room, went straight through the middle of the two tables and went to the headmaster. "Someone is in your office. I was just passing and you need to get in there now. It could be a death eater." He reminded him and for the first time ever Albus actually hoped it was a death eater. That a servant of Voldemort had broken his defences there at Hogwarts and got into his school. That was an easier conclusion to handle than the one he had come to.

For such an old man, Albus ran surprisingly fast to his office. Passing the tables he stopped for none of the students and told the professors who were listening to him, not Umbridge, to keep the students in the great hall until he was sure of what had happened and that it was safe for the children.

Upon going up the staircase to his office though, he knew something was wrong and that it was not a Death Eater who had done this. He simply innately knew it was her.

His office was destroyed, but the attack was over by the time he found her. It was normally too quiet time, but this one from the sound it had made alone was almighty. Something had been different about

this attack. Whether it was the cause or the ferocity he just didn't know, but what he did know without having to ask was she was not going to recover in a hurry.

"Ariana?" he said as he raced over to her. Her eyes were wide and unresponsive. The only thing he could think of to compare it to was how the students who had been petrified when the Chamber of Secrets had been opened looked. He looked at his desk and his heart sunk. There was no prizes for guessing what had set her off. How had he been so careless as to leave memories like those out? He had thought they were not seeing one another that weekend. As far as he had been concerned she had been at the pub. But more than once she had just walked into his office. He should have thought. Why hadn't he thought?

"Shall I get Poppy?" asked Minerva.

"I think that might be a good idea," nodded the headmaster. He turned his attention to his sister. This was not the norm for an attack. She didn't shut down like this, she could talk to the them, tell her what had happened to her.

"Come on lovely, talk to me." Picking her body up he carried her thought to her room and set her on the bed. "Ariana please, come on darling," he muttered to her as he tried to warm her up...she was freezing. Why had she been here and how hadn't he known? He felt panic rise within him. Why wasn't she responding to him? She had too...

The Gryffindor head of house and nurse returned quickly but there was no sign of life. Ariana was breathing, that was all. Apart from that ... nothing.

"Minerva, can you call Aberforth and fetch Severus?" Albus pleaded." I can't leave her right now but they both have to come. I need to know why she is here." He told her. Minerva nodded and left the room.

The potions master arrived first. "I need you to look into her thoughts, why this had happened. I'd do it myself, but if I am being honest with you dear boy... I can't face it."

Severus nodded and entered the room, passing Poppy on the way out. Albus sat on the sofa and looked into her room. She had left him with a cold feeling for the first time... his Ariana was warm and a vibrant young woman who he was so proud of. And now it was as if she just was not there. Nothing. She had been so vacant when he had seen her.

"Albus, I am so sorry but it is a lot more serious than when she came to us for the first time." said Poppy. It was as if the girl was in a coma. She had had very little experience in this field and she was not yet sure how to handle the situation. As ever when it came to the headmaster's sister, she had to do her research before she was going to be able to help her.

"Will you be able to bring her round?" he begged to know. His voice was on the edge of breaking with all the emotion.

"I can't say for sure yet. We are simply going to have to wait and see."

Albus nodded. There was nothing else he could do. It was at that moment that Aberforth, still in his apron, ran into the room.

"Where is she?" he begged.

"Brother mine please-"

"No. No, don't you dare 'brother mine' me!" He said in a slightly menacing way. "She has been fine ever since she has come home. I kept her safe, happy and calm. And now, you watch her for one night and I am told she has had an attack? ONE BLOODY NIGHT! Albus, what the hell has happened? Where is she? Where is my girl?" he asked furiously. He had to get her home; he had to get her safe.

It was at that moment Snape walked back into the room. He didn't know quite how to tell the two brothers what he had just witnessed but he knew he had to find a way to tell them. The three others in the room turned to him. "It seems your sister saw some memories this morning. She knows she killed your mother." Aberforth's eyes went

wide with fear. That was the one thing he had never ever wanted her to find out. That could destroy her forever!

“Go on Severus. Why was she here in the first place?” Albus questioned. He had to know.

“Last night, your sister slept in the Room of Requirement with Potter. It does seem that they consummated their relationship.”

The tension could be felt within the room. They were all silent. Whatever Poppy had been expecting him to say, it was not that. She knew what a shock this had to be for the Dumbledores. How the two of them doted on their precious baby sister! Any one would think the girl was a princess.

Aberforth sat down and put his head in his hands. He felt his eyes well up with tears and he let one from. He didn't even care that they could all see how he was feeling. It didn't matter anymore.

“No,” he whispered. “You're wrong. She wouldn't do that. Ariana wouldn't do that. She's a good girl. Our mother - there is no way she would have approved of that and Ariana would not go against her wishes. And – she can't have! She is a baby, nothing more. Besides that she said to me she had come up to see Albus for the night. She wouldn't have lied to me, not my Ari.” He said suddenly standing up and walking in to the room where she lay so still.

“It's me,” he said to her trying to bring her round. “Come on, its Aba, I have come to take you home now.” he said as the tears flowed freely down his face. This wasn't happening, this was not real! She couldn't have been taken from him all over again.

-

Harry, who had been up in the tower by the time she had had the attack, had no idea what had just happened. Even though he had heard the bang, he made no connection to what he had heard to Ariana.

Ariana. He smiled. His wonderful life. Nothing mattered apart from the fact that he got to see her that evening and the fact they were one another's whole existences.

Sirius forced his way through the portrait door when a first year said the password. He had raced to the tower.

Hermione, Ron, Harry and Ginny turned to see the flying professor. He had tears running down his face. He had seen Ariana in her brother's office and just as the headmaster did he knew that there was something seriously wrong with Ariana this time. There was not going to be a two or three week recovery this time.

"Harry..." he said. Rushing to his godfather's side, Harry felt his heart begun to race. What had happened to upset Sirius this badly?

"It's Ariana. Harry she had an attack this morning. She's in a really bad way," he told him.

Harry shook his head. "I saw her an hour ago," he told him, not thinking that there was no rule abiding way that would have been possible. But he didn't care. Not when he got news such as this. "I mean, she was fine, she was perfect."

Only Hermione so far knew what had gone on the previous night. The others looked at him confused, especially Ron who had thought he had slept in his godfather's apartment the night before.

But as godfather and godson locked eyes, Harry knew. He knew it in his heart. She was gone, and for how long this time was what he didn't know.

Please review!

Chapter 52

Neither knowing or caring whether or not he was welcome, Harry James Potter burst into the Hospital Wing. He had just found out Ariana had been moved there from her brothers office and he felt he had to be with her. There was no way he could not be there if she was hurt. She would need him to be there with her.

His mind had been racing as he had run to the Hospital Wing. What had happened to her? That was all he wanted to know. She had been so happy when they had left one another that morning. He had been so happy because when he had thought about it, he had figured out what the two of them were to one another now. They weren't one another's lovers. They were one another's family. Who cared if they weren't married or had blood ties? No wife had meant this much to her husband. No wife had ever understood her husband as she did him. They were family.

And she was all the family he needed in that moment.

As he walked in to the Hospital Wing he felt his chest rise up and down with every breathe he took. It was as if everything was so intense, but not in the way it had been the night before. Not in the good way.

All he could think was that she was and always was going to be his sweetheart and that this wasn't happening. Not really. They were going to be together that evening, they were! Sirius had to be exaggerating the situation didn't he? She couldn't have been taken from him when they were so close to everything they had ever wanted.

They were meant to be together forever. They were going to go to France or Ireland... Italy. He replayed all the moments they had had together. Every precious breathe had taken when they had been with one another.

"Baby..." he said as he went into the hospital wing. In the bed furthest away he could see her. Her brothers were with her as was Snape and Pomfrey. He should have expected her to be surrounded he knew

but because he had been thinking of them as a whole so much he forgotten the rest of the world. Behind him Hermione, Ron and Sirius followed him into the room.

“Sweetheart,” he cried as he walked towards the bed but before he could get to her, before he could even see her he found that his path to her had been blocked by Aberforth.

“I trusted you with her! You little barsted!” he yelled his face.

“Aberforth, that is enough,” Albus said as he came over and tried to restrain his distraught brother.

“No you are wrong Albus, your wrong that is not nearly enough for what he did. If our father was here today he would do to him exactly what he did to those boys!” he said to him.

Harry realised they knew quickly. There was nothing else that would make Aberforth react to him like that and the professor had never looked at him so coldly. He had done much over the years to break the school rules but Albus Dumbledore had never been cold with him. But the old man was now.

“What the hell is he supposed to have done,” said Sirius as he jumped to his god son’s defence. “All he has ever done is love your sister!” he said to both the angry men.

“A little bit too much,” Albus replied. The insinuation was obvious and as Sirius turned to Harry, there was no way Harry could deny what he had done.

“Me and Ariana – last night.” He said to Sirius who put his head in his hands.

“You have got to be kidding me Harry.”

Had it been under any other circumstances Harry was sure that his god father would be congratulating him on what he had done. But so much had changed the moment that she had been struck down. The world was not what it had been when he had woken up.

Turning back to the Dumbledore brothers, he knew he was ready to plead if he had too.

“You have to let me be with her,” he said to them. He wasn’t sure if he knew how to be without her now. Not after the night before. He didn’t expect any of them to understand the bond that was forged between the two of them now. No, the only one who understood what he felt for her was the girl who lay in the bed.

“We have to do nothing,” said Aberforth to him. As long as he was there he vowed then that boy was not going to get near his baby again, he just wasn’t going to. It wasn’t going to happen. There was no way he was going to let him near her.

Ever the more rational brother Albus could see where both of them were coming from. He knew full well that his sister had consented to whatever had happened the night before because if she had not then Severus would have told them. Besides she was madly in love with Harry and all any one had ever had to do was look at her to know that was the truth.

He knew that she had wanted last night to happen just as much as Harry did. But it did not make the fact that it had happened any easier for the two brothers to digest. The sister who they had tried so hard to protect against everything and anything that could hurt her, the sister they had tried so desperately hard to give a childhood at long last...

She, it seemed, had in the end been in a hurry to grow up.

And now she was gone. And he understood that Aberforth had to blame someone for that. When she had gone before he had got on with his life. He had studied, he had indeed become brilliant and he was now Headmaster of Hogwarts. But all Aberforth had ever had without her was the pain and the hope that some way, somehow he was going to get her back in the end. And he had. And again that was all he had been left with when he had got so used to having her about him again brightening up the darkest of his days.

But when he looked at Harry he also saw a boy who had had so little for so long. Then he had this love that had opened up a new world to him...and it was over now.

It was over for all of them he realised as a tear fell from his eyes. The same eyes she also had.

“Stop fighting!” he demanded of them all. She would not want them all to be at one another’s throats over her. Miss Granger was looking particularly devastated by what had happened. He knew that she was her closet girl friend.

Making her way past Harry and Aberforth, Hermione moved closer to Dumbledore knowing from the way that he looked at her that he was sympathetic with her. But he could not evaporate her guilt; he could only serve to heighten it. She had been the one who had helped her sneak into the school. She had been the one who had led her here.

“What happened?” Hermione asked. Her dry throat meant that her voice was cracked with emotion. Sitting down, Hermione reached out and took her hand.

“She learnt something about the past she was never meant to find out.” Aberforth said as he turned to her. He didn’t want them all here but he knew he could not send them away with Albus backing him up. Why was he accepting them here? It felt as if they had come to see her dead body even if she was still breathing. Why could they not show them a bit of respect and just go? All he wanted was for them to be gone!

“What?” asked Harry. He had to know. He had to understand what had shocked her into such a huge attack that she still had not come round... That she could not come about from.

Albus turned to Aberforth. He knew what he was asking, of course he did. Whether he could tell the others? A short, curt painful nod was given by the barman. He hated Potter, but even he could not deny the fact he was obviously just as devastated as the rest of them were that this had happened.

Turning to the window that looked out on to the grounds he tried not to listen, but he could help it.

“When Ariana was fourteen, she had a particularly bad attack. She just couldn’t control herself, she didn’t know how too. Aberforth was away and I was no good with her back then. My mother went to her and tried to calm her but Ariana’s attack was too serve for her to get through to her and –“ Albus tried to fight the tears that seemed to be ever flowing but he could not. “She didn’t mean too, it was a complete accident – but mother died.”

Understandably the others looked horrified at what they had just heard.

“She killed her?” said Harry in disbelief. She hadn’t meant to but somehow that didn’t change what he had just heard. The girl who had told him god knows how many times that she loved and missed her mother was the reason she was not there. And she had had no idea. He shook her head. “She isn’t a murderer. Ariana is not a killer.” He insisted.

“No, she is not. But that does not change the fact that during one of her attacks our mother tried to calm her and did not survive her efforts.” said Albus to him. The headmaster knew the difference of his sister being a murderer as Harry had put it and being the cause of her mother’s death. There was a difference.

“She really never knew she had done it until today?” he checked.

“My sister could not have lived with the knowledge that she had done it. This is why we are here Potter.” Aberforth said to him. “Had she not known, then we would not be here now.” He couldn’t even blame Albus who had obviously had no idea she was at the castle.

Harry looked at the body on the bed. This changed everything and nothing all at once. The fact she had no idea was obvious. She had a troubled conscience at the best of times. To know she had killed her most beloved mama would have been the end of her. And now it was.

But... she had taken another’s life.

"I don't know what to think." Harry admitted to them as they all stood about her bed. He just didn't know how to react to this news. He didn't blame her though... she was innocent!

He felt a pair of arms wrap about him and he was suddenly glad for the presence of his godfather. He knew he had his best friends were there for him but it was the physical contact that he had needed in that moment. To know that there was someone else alive in the world. Because it did not feel like it. All he could see was the girl in the bed, laying motionless.

Wake up Ari ...

He so needed her to be there. He needed her.

"She can't be gone. She has to wake up, Sirius, she has too," he said to his god father who continued to embrace him. Tears streamed down all of their faces. Even Ron was crying at the sight of his friend so absent from her body.

"Poppy," Albus said desperately to the nurse as she came over. They all looked at her longingly hoping that there might just be some chance, some glimmer of hope she might know something new. But it was obvious from the look on her face that for now there was very little she could tell them.

"She is a very ill girl right now Albus. She is going to need about the clock care. I don't know how long it is going to be till she wakes up. I don't know." She paused knowing this was going to be the most devastating thing for all of them ... "if she is going to wake up."

"But she is alive!" Ron asked.

"Of course she is alive, Mr Weasley."

"Then there has to be hope she is going to recover from this doesn't there? There's more chance she is going to wake up than she isn't." He said.

The others nodded. They had to cling to those words. Reaching out, he took Hermione's hand. She looked as if she needed him.

"Poppy, she still has her magic doesn't she?" Albus asked.

"Yes, she does. There is hope. I promise you that."

-

Harry lay numbly on Sirius' sofa. He didn't ever remember feeling like this. Even when he had seen Cedric die he hadn't felt this sense of loss. It was as if part of him had been ripped from his whole body. It was as if his heart had been destroyed. He could not think or at least he did not want to. It hurt too much because he found that if he thought then he was bound to remember all the times they had been together and he didn't want to remember at that moment. Rather, he wanted to forget.

Sirius sat by him on the floor and he ran a gentle hand through Harry's hair, wishing desperately that James and Lily were there with them. He did not know what they would be able to do right then that he could not but he felt as if they were who he needed.

"She is going to get better."

"Don't say that to me," Harry whispered. "No one knows if it is true," he said as he ran his hand through his messy hair, a lot like the way his father used to, interrupting Sirius' soothing hand. "You know we didn't spend a night apart in three months." He said to him. Feeling the need to tell someone about just how close they had got since they were in their fifth year, he told his godfather everything - about how they had wanted one another more and more. How intense their love had become and how he had so wanted her physically as well as emotionally for months before they had had their one single night together.

"I never knew you could love like that until I met her. Ariana changed my life forever. Sirius, I don't want to be without her."

Sirius nodded. That was so clear from the way that Harry spoke about her. Harry was so full of love for her. They were meant to be together the two of them. And they would be one day again, he was sure.

"I'm going to wait a life time to get her back if I have too."

"I know you will." Sirius said to him as he kissed his forehead and got up. "You need to eat. You need food. I'm going to do you some toast ok?"

Harry knew he was not going to eat it but thought if it kept his godfather happy to feel he was doing something, then the teenager wasn't going to stop him.

"Sirius?" there was something that had been playing on his mind ever since they had got back to his quarters.

"Yes Harry?"

"Why did Dumbledore ask if Ariana still had her magic?" that had confused him even when they had been up there.

If possible, Sirius looked even graver than he had before. "Harry you have to understand something. When a witch or wizard loses control of their magic, or something too traumatic happens, then they can at times lose their magic. If they reject it for long enough, then it can abandon them in the end."

"So if that happened what would happen to them?" he asked with his red rimmed green eyes.

"Magic is like oxygen to us Harry. If you lose your magic, you can't survive. It won't be an instantaneous death, but you'd fade away slowly." He said with all the sadness in his voice that was only befitting for such a subject. "But Harry that did not happen. She is still a witch, and very much alive, with magic in her veins. It's like Ron said – where there's life, there's hope."

Please review!

Chapter 53

New Years was unbearable. It was a year since they had got together. A year since they had shared that first kiss. And now he didn't think that they had ever been so far from one another.

He stayed with Sirius for most of the holidays. He didn't remember ever feeling like this. He hadn't over his parents. He had never really knew them he realised. Not in the way that he had her. And now he just felt as if he was alone.

Whenever he asked for new news there was never anything new. No new news on when she might be rejoining the land of the living which by the looks of things was not going to be any time soon.

A dreadful December soon turned into a painful January. Harry paid little attention – to, well anything. He did not care for chatter in the common room after lessons. He did not take any note as the snow fell and melted once more, as he would have had she been there to point it out to him. Her presence in his life was so keenly missed and intensely felt.

At the Hogshead life was not much better. Aberforth continued to walk around in a daze weeks after the attack. It was as if all the fight had left him for a time. He had become to accustom to having her with him. He was no longer used to the huge vacuum her absence in his life caused.

He didn't understand why she had done what she had and that what what was upsetting him the most. The thought of her and that boy together haunted him. She had always seemed so small and innocent and all the time she had been thinking about. It felt in a weird way a betrayal of him when she had gone to Harry. It was a betrayal of all the family values he had tried to imprint on her as their parents had done to him.

But he was not going to abandon her now. How could he? Days were spent at work and nights were spent in the hospital wing by her side, talking to her gently. He was going to bring her back round if it killed

him. He had fought to get her back once more and he would do so again he promised himself.

Albus seemed just as devastated. His guilt seemed to be added to with every day that passed without her opening her bright blue eyes. If he had not left the memories out then she would not ever have learnt the awful truth over their mother's death and then maybe, just maybe, she would still be there. Or if they had not ended her Hogwarts career he would not have left the pensieve there. There were so many, too many what ifs for his mind to digest.

He seemed to be gone over every little thing in his mind. Every cross road they had come to since she had arrived. Had he made a wrong decision? Had he put her back into her madness?

Yet unlike Harry and his brother he forced himself to keep focus because there was going to be a way to get her back, he told himself. And when she did get back they were going to embrace and be a family once more. They were. He had to believe that.

Besides he had the added advantage of having other focuses in his life such as the Order of the Phoenix. He had to stay strong for them.

But that did not mean there was not a moment of the day when his sister was not on his mind for she always was. He went to see Pomfrey at least three times a day. However, in this period of the year his sister was not the only case she had to deal with. There were colds and flus going about Hogwarts and she had to help all the students. In fact Ariana wasn't even a student, so technically she should be at the bottom of the nurse's priorities.

That did not mean she was though. Every spare moment she was reading something new or if she had missed something. But there was just nothing she could see to do to help her. And it broke the nurse's heart.

"Albus there is nothing I can find to improve the situation!" she admitted to the professor late one night in early January. Potter had as usual been in to see Ariana already. Aberforth had protested to begin with but then Albus had convinced him it was cruel to deny the

boy, who was obviously so devoted to their sister, the small comfort of sitting with her for an hour. Aberforth had also come and gone. It was just the headmaster and the nurse by the side of the comatose girl.

Since she had been brought up she had been changed into a plain white robe but apart from that she had hardly changed. The nurse gave her nutrition through drips. She breathed, but she didn't move. It was an appalling sight.

It was more than evident to the headmaster that the nurse was getting rapidly frustrated with the situation. She hated it when she was unable to do her job. And it was her job to get people better. But this was an entirely new case for her to take on.

"You are doing your best Poppy and that is all any of us can ask of you. I know that." He said soothingly his eyes not leaving his little sister. His long bony fingers encapsulated the girl's small, slender ones.

It was a sight she was getting used to but it still touched her. And it gave her the motivation to go on with the at times hopeless search.

"Sir there is something else you should be aware of. Umbridge. She was in here earlier, asking questions. I kept Ariana from her but I do not know if I am going to be able to doing it again if she comes. Ariana needs to be some where she can be safe till we can recover her." the nurse urged.

What she said made sense to him. He should have known that she was going to get involved in this sooner or later. He had to get her to a secure place. It was a rare thing the headmaster took against anyone, but in the case of Umbridge he was more than willing to make a concession. All he wanted was to keep his family safe.

"Hogwarts needs its nurse back Poppy." Her told her gently.

"Surely not? You won't take her to –"

“St Mungos?” he shook his head. “We have brought her this far without needing to take her there. And besides if I even so much as considered that as a visible option then I am sure my brother would not fail to block my every attempt. No I can’t take her there. She needs her own nurse though. I’ll find someone, and a place.” He wouldn’t fail her. Not this time.

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As soon as he heard what had happened with Umbridge, Sirius knew that they were going to be trying to move Ariana out of harm’s way. While he did not relish the thought of opening up his ancestral home or going back there, Grimmauld place was going to give Ariana the security that the Dumbledores so needed to give her.

Needs must.

Aberforth as soon as he got Albus note came to his office. He knew he should not let it get his hopes up but he had thought for one glorious moment that there might be some new ion her condition and when she was going to come about. When he found out it was about moving her somewhere more permanent for the duration of her illness he could not hide his disappointment.

“Why doesn’t she just come home to the pub?” he offered.

It was the obvious solution to him but his brother shook his head.

“It is too obvious. That is the first place they are going to go looking for her.” The article which had been in the prophet was still playing on his mind and the haunting thought that Umbridge might be plotting something was tormenting his heart. ‘Ariana the abnormal...’

As much as he wanted nothing to do with Potter or his godfather at that moment, he had to let his head rule his heart. If she was going to be placed somewhere safe that could only be a good thing.

“Then I am going to go with her.” He said to him. If she was moving to a new home permanently then he would go with her.

Albus had seen that he was going to say that and he nodded. It was right that one of them should go with her. They were after all her guardians.

"When are we going to move her?" he asked.

"As soon as we can. I want to get her out of the castle by tomorrow night at the latest. Are you going to be able to find cover for the pub?" he asked.

Aberforth nodded. He would find it if it meant he could stay with her.

"Sirius Black has been very good letting us have his parents house for her, however he did mention that for quite some time now it has been empty. He said he would come and help us at the weekend clear it but it will need cleaning."

"As long as it is safe then don't suppose the condition is really that important. After all she isn't going to be aware of the difference is she?"

Albus shook his head. No she was not.

"When she is there she can have her own healer to help take care of her until we can figure out how to bring her round. I have arranged it already. Her name is Elaine Tusker and she is an old friend and a loyal heart. She was in the first order of the Phoenix and joined up this time as well. If this is all agreeable to you that it." The old tension between the two of them since their sisters attack had returned. One again Albus felt he had to ask his little brothers permission when it came to their sister.

With a numb nod of the head the bar man agreed. He hated that there was always a logic behind what his brother was saying to him. It made it so much harder for him to argue his own much weaker point.

"Good. Then you shall both be there by this time tomorrow. And she shall once again be safe."

Aberforth needed to the first point but shrugged at the second. Had she ever been safe? Had they ever made her truly safe? The fact remained that the darkness they were trying to save her from came from within.

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When Sirius had said to the headmaster that the house was in a bit of a state, he not been lying. Albus could only blush when he thought of what his mother would say about her two youngest living in such conditions. But they were going to clear it up, they would have too. It would not remain as it was for long, he hoped.

Early in the morning he had gone to survey the place. It was full of dark objects, unsavoury items and dust. Lots of dust.

How did they come to this?

Black arrived later in the day when he had taught his first year class. He was taking the news badly as well and so had become determined to help. Albus was obviously grateful but as ever Aberforth remained cold.

"It is suitable Albus?" he asked as he strolled down the hall way careful not to wake his mother portrait into the kitchen .

"Yes it is. Thank you so much for this Sirius. It means a lot to have her safe."

"Well that is what she did for me." He reminded him. Albus' gave a small smile but his eye lacked the usual twinkled which was one of the biggest give away just how wrong things had gone for the Dumbledore's.

"Have you told Harry we are moving her from Hogwarts yet?" Albus asked. He had been wondering who was the right one to deliver the news and whether he should do it, or leave it to the boys godfather.

"No." Sirius admitted to the headmaster. He had been trying to find the words and the courage to tell him that his time with the girl was

going to be limited but there was no way he had yet found that was going to make the fact any less of a blow to his godson.

“I didn’t think he was going to take it so badly.” Albus admitted. As ever he was underestimating Harry’s courage which was beginning to seem boundless. Once he had got used to the fact that he had slept with his sister (though there were days when it was still difficult to digest), he was once again coming about to Harry. He had always felt duty bound to protect the boy for Lily and James. He was also forced to admit that if he was not there when she came about that his sister was likely never to forgive him.

He had still not summoned the courage to look into her mind of those last hours when she had been so alive. He was going to one day but somehow he could not face it. Not yet.

“Well he loves in the same way as he father did. It was all or nothing for James when it came to Lily. As soon as I saw him with Ariana for the first time I knew it was going to be a case of history repeating itself.”

Dumbledore looked at Sirius and he saw the animagus had become quite emotion at the thought of his best friends as ever, but it was more than that. Sirius had known from the start that this could only end badly. And now it had. Another love that had been so precious destroyed by external forces.

“I am afraid it will be.”

Elaine Tusker arrived an hour later. Sirius found her to be dumpy, short witch with brown hair but she had a jolly personality. Her lack of personal involvement in Ariana’s case and her history so far meant that she was able to inject some humour into their conversation, the like of which he had not heard for a few days, though he doubted Aberforth when he got there was going to appreciate it.

Ariana and Aberforth were due to arrive by six o’clock that night and so he spent the day with Elaine and Albus getting ready and cleaning two of the guest rooms which were side by side with a adjoining door. If she needed him at night, he was going to be there.

"They're going to be here any minute," said Sirius to Elaine as they walked down into the kitchen, Albus having left them to go and help his brother gather his sister things.

"Is there anything you have not told me yet about Ariana or her brother?" she asked.

"Not really. Only that he is extremely protective and is probably going to get in your way and ask a lot of questions when it comes to her care. She is still his kid sister. He loves her."

"I cannot image what they are going through. When Albus was telling me what happened to her - well, he was struggling to do so. I felt for him." She admitted.

"Who doesn't?" Sirius asked in reply rhetorically.

"Listen, are you going to be ok on your own here for a while? I have to get back up to the school and tell my godson what is going on." He said to her. She nodded as she drunk the last of the tea she had been given half an hour earlier and watched as he walked up out the room.

Once back in the castle he proceeded to the hospital wing, heading Harry off just as he got there. Harry had looked brighter that day until he saw his god father.

"What's going?" he asked. It was written all over Sirius face that he had something to tell him, and Harry had begun to live by the rule of no news is good news. If he didn't hear anything then at least she was alive. That was the blessing he was beginning to live for.

"Harry you have to come down to my rooms. I have to tell you something." He said to him.

"Can you tell me on the way?"

Knowing that if he did not then he was only going to agitated his godson, he told him what had happened with Umbridge. He watched

as his godsons face turned into an unnatural sneer. He didn't think Harry hehad ever hated any one so much or so openly.

"Any way the point is that it was not going to be safe to keep Ariana at Hogwarts anymore." He said. "They had to move her to Grimmauld Place. It was my home when I was a child. It isn't nice but it secure thanks to my Father."

Harry said nothing in response to his god father until they reached his quarters. He was having trouble digesting this latest piece of bad luck. They hadn't even let him say goodbye.

"I am not going to see her that much now, am I?" he questioned. Were they going to deny him the chance just to see her face? That was his only, his one comfort!

"You won't see her daily, that's for sure."

Harry collapsed into the sofa. When was it going to stop?

"She is all I ever wanted Sirius." He told him. "I have to see her."

"And you will. I will take you to see her every weekend if that is what you want. But that is the most I can give you right now." He said and he felt he was failing him. It was enough, they both knew it! Harry looked down at his shoes, ignoring what his godfather was saying. All he knew was that he hated life without her. He loved Sirius, Ron and Hermione dearly. But they just didn't understand the way she had.

And nights were the worst. As January had drizzled by he had had to get used to having a single bed to himself again. There was no warm body next to him. There was no one to cuddle or reach out for. He had forgotten what it was to be alone.

Tears welled up in his eyes. Turning into his godfather he begun to sob. Sirius shut up. Harry didn't want to hear what he had to say clearly.

He just wanted to be held.

-

Albus and Aberforth sat in the kitchen of Twelve Grimmauld Place. They were exhausted and were both quite ready for bed. However, Elaine had been left to do her first examination of Ariana. They would wait for the results and then say goodnight.

Aberforth had not been as shocked by the houses unkempt condition as his brother had thought he was going to be. In fact, he had not even mentioned it and it was then that he begun to truly understand the depths of despair that he had felt since their sister had once again fell so far from their grasp.

It was as if nothing else mattered.

Albus shut his eyes. He wanted to be a better brother to Aberforth. To make it better for him. But there was no way he could. Not until they got her back.

It was at that moment that Elaine came back into the room. She had a troubled look on her face.

"Have you found something?" asked Aberforth, alert for seemingly the first time.

"Yes I have. It was not what I was looking for but..." she trailed off. "I mean, it is hardly a surprise it has gone unnoticed. Ariana has been so ill it is the problem of her mind people have been focusing on..."

"Just tell us." Albus pleaded and so summoning her courage, she nodded. She didn't want to make him panic, but that was exactly what her news was going to do.

"Albus, your sister – she's with child."

Please Review!

Chapter 54

Just when he thought things could not possibly get any worse they did, Aberforth mused to himself. She was a child and she was having a child. This was not right. He didn't think he had wanted his mother and father back so much for years. If Percival and Kendra were there then he was sure that together they would take strong decisive action which would in the end bring about the best outcome for their daughter.

As it was, all Ariana had were two brothers who were in conflict with themselves over the news. They had no right to decide for her what to do over the baby. They could not ask someone to get rid of it because of all the options she might have had was she awake, they both knew that was not the route she would go down.

No, if she was here and she was able to choose what was to be done about the child, Aberforth knew what she would be bound to say. So clearly that he was able to hear her voice in his head.

"This was my mistake, if you want to call it that Aberforth. But now I have to face up to the consequences. I am going to keep and raise this baby with your help or not!"

But of course she would have it. They would fight and then he would cave into her desires as he always did.

This time though she was not there to wrap him and Albus about her little finger. If they really thought it was going to be best for her then maybe they should simply get rid.

He shook his head. He couldn't do that to her. Not even now, when she was putting him through this. The baby was part of his family too now. He had to protect his sisters child when she was not there to do so.

He was sitting in his brother's office when he heard the door open. He didn't have to look know who it was. Together, Black and Potter came into the room and Albus observed them. The four of them were going to decide the fate of a mother and her child. Of all the things Albus

had ever had to do this was the hardest, as it was an emotional problem there was no way out of. But of course, in reality, even though they were going to talk it through as if they had equal say, the final choice was going to have to come down to Harry.

He was, after all, the baby's fathers.

Harry was utterly confused about why he had been asked to go and see them. He knew it had to be to do with Ari but normally he found Albus and Aberforth Dumbledore, on the whole, tried to stay away from him now, which could be most frustrating.

Life was confusing him more and more. He thought back to his dreams of the corridors, the lessons he had had to start with Snape to master Occlumency. He was sure that Dumbledore could teach him, but assumed the reason he had chosen not to were the recent events that had gone on with Ari.

But then in their eyes, he was the reason they had lost her all over again. So did he blame them for wanting to keep their distance? No.

"Harry, Sirius thank you so much for coming. We need to discuss something quite serious." He said as they sat down.

The desk had been cleared away to one side of the room. They sat in a circle looking at each other. For that moment without his desk and his twinkling eyes it was as if Dumbledore had lost his authority. They were equals.

"It is something to do with Ariana's condition."

"Is she ok?" asked Harry desperately.

"Define 'ok'." Aberforth muttered bitterly and shook his head.

"Last night, when we got to Grimmauld Place Healer Tucker examined Ariana with a fresh eye. While we are still clueless as to how to get her back, we did find something else out. Harry, your night together," he said and Harry saw the headmasters face twist up in

distress. “Well, my sister – she’s...” he had never had so much trouble delivering as piece of news before. “She is having a baby.”

If someone had dropped a pin in the office at that moment, you would have heard it. The silence was almost deathly as the two males tried to digest what they had just been told. The four males looked at one another, unsure what to say next. But then there was a deep breathing from Harry and for the first time since he had seen her walk out of the Room of Requirement, a real smile spread across his face. Albus didn’t know how he had been expecting him to react, but not like this.

“She’s – she’s having a baby? My baby.” He breathed as he begun to chuckle. It reminded Sirius of how James had reacted, or how Lily had described his reaction. As if he had just been told he had won the Quidditch World Cup singlehandedly.

“We’re going to be parents.”

Aberforth shook his head in disbelief. Why was the boy reacting as if they were a married couple who had been waiting for this news? Why was he acting as if she wasn’t in a coma? As if she could run up and embrace him as they celebrated the ‘good’ news. He was acting as if they were any other parents who had been waiting to hear they were to have their first born.

But Harry did not register the anger on the bar man’s face. He did not turn to Sirius for his reaction to the news, which was somewhere between the two polar extremes of Aberforth’s and Harry’s. All he heard was he news Albus had given him. They were having a baby! In a few months, nine or eight now, he presumed his and Ariana’s child was going to come into the world. He already hoped the baby had her eyes. No other thought apart from how glad he was entered his head.

They weren’t ever going to go away just the two of them, he thought to himself delighted. Because they weren’t meant to be alone. They were meant to be a family. He had always known it all along. After weeks of rain and misery, a brilliant sunshine had come into his life. Something to look forward to and long for. She would come round.

She would have too. When she had their child... she'd come back. She'd wake up.

"Harry?" asked Sirius.

"I – I – Sirius, I mean, she's carrying – she'll wake up. We'll be together – a family." He said as his broken speech fell out of his mouth. He was beyond happy. "Sir I have to see her, you must let me!"

Aberforth had expected a conversation, rationality, which was of course Albus's specialty. He had expected a long drawn out debate over what was right for them both, mother and child. But no. Rather than need that, Potter had strolled in and he had stepped right up to the mark. Now he thought about it they could not have hoped for a better reaction.

They were never going to like one another. But his reaction had gained him some of the respect he had lost. He had thought the boy would dither. But no. He had come straight down on the course of action he intended them all to take.

"You're going to stand by her, aren't you?" he asked.

Harry looked at him in confusion. Had he seriously believed after all they had come through together, after all the love, comfort and support that had flowed between them he was going to walk out on her? He didn't have a choice because his heart wouldn't allow another option.

He knew they were only sixteen. But they both had people about them who loved them. This baby would be loved. They'd be helped and it would be ok!

"Of course."

"But Harry – a baby. She's so unwell." Sirius pointed out.

"If it doesn't bring Ariana back, then there are four of us. If you don't want to help, Sirius, I'll do it on my own but we're having this baby."

“Don’t be silly of course I’ll help you. But Harry this is it. You’ll be an adult. Your childhood – Ariana’s over.” Could he really make that choice for her?

“Neither of our childhoods ever really got going though,” he said softly. There was no accusation in his voice, just a statement. It was a fact. The two of them had had to grow up fast. The snippets of a childhood they had had were not conventional. But they’d deal with adulthood, parenthood better. This was a twist of fate. Something he hadn’t seen coming. But life had thrown him a Quaffle, and he was going out to the Quidditch pitch whether they were coming or not.

“Can I please go and see her?” he pleaded with the headmaster and Aberforth. Slowly Aberforth nodded. He knew he wasn’t going to change Potters mind. He hadn’t expected there to be that violent out pouring of joy about the fact she had been pregnant from the boy. From the man – Harry Potter.

He had grown up in the moment he had heard he was to be a father and silently, made a promise to himself, his parents, his Ari and their child. The baby was going have everything they could only long for. His baby wasn’t going to ever sleep in a cupboard under the stairs, or be attacked by twisted little boys. It was going to have everything they could only dream of.

“Of course,” He said the ageing Headmaster giving them permission to go and he found himself alone with his brother once more, Sirius having followed Harry.

“I suppose we should be grateful for the devotion he has shown her. Harry has a loyal heart.” Albus mused. He had proved that when he had pulled out the sword of Gryffindor in his second year.

“I suppose.” He sighed.

“This isn’t what you want for her is it?” he asked.

“I don’t want her to be a mother at sixteen, no. But decisions made. We go ahead with it.” He said as he put his head in his hands. “I am

doing it because I know this is what she would want. Not because of him...”

“I know that.”

-

Sirius felt almost uncomfortable as he saw his godson go into see his girlfriend. He felt as if this should be a moment for just the two of them to share but Harry did not look as if he wanted him to go and so he slid into the room and sat on the other side of the bed. Ariana room was dark, as was everything in the house, but her window was opened to allow fresh air to circulate and her face was illuminated by candle light.

Healer Tusker had left the room for a moment when she had learnt that the baby's father had come to see the girl. Who would have thought it of the sainted Boy-Who-Lived?

But of course he was just Harry to Ariana. He had always been just Harry.

Moving close to her than he had been in days, instead of grabbing her hand as he had done on all previous visits to her he reached out and put his hand on her stomach. In there somewhere was his baby. His thumb begun to stroke it, Harry feeling he wanted all the love he had in him to seep through Ariana to their child, and of course herself.

Their child.

It was as if the news had forced him to look at life with a fresh eye. It wasn't enough to walk about in a daze any more because he had something to look forward to. And as usual the catalyst for that was Ariana.

He didn't think she had ever been so beautiful and glorious in her slumber. Her hair, the shape of her eyes, the way her lips met, the length of her nose even! This was the mother of his baby.

He knew he had nine long months to wait. Less than that, she must have been pregnant for what – three weeks already? He couldn't do the math - his head was too full. But each of them, each month would be worth it.

"I love you so much." Harry whispered. Sirius wasn't sure if he was talking to Ariana or the baby she was carrying. It didn't matter he supposed. As long as that grin stayed on his godson's face he did not care. This was the Harry he knew and loved, not the sad lost boy of a few days ago. This was his Harry – and he was back to fight for his family.

"Sirius, I don't believe this. I know part of you must be looking at me the way I look at Hagrid when he tells us he has got a new pet. It's that mad - I mean us two having a baby." He was laughing practically. "The Chosen one and the only girl at Hogwarts loopyier than Luna. But it just feels so right. There's been a purpose to it all."

All the suffering was going to make sense when he took his son or his daughter in his arms he was sure.

"No, you don't Harry. I think you look like any other dad who has just found out the woman they love is giving them a child."

Harry wanted the two of them to stay together in that moment forever, him and Ari. But more than that he wanted her eye lids to flutter open to see his face so that he might be the one who told him they were going to have a baby together.

"I love her..."

He stayed there with her for quite some time having not been there the day before, but like Aberforth he did not comment on the dust or the state of the run down home. He knew they were safe at Sirius' and that was all that mattered. That Ariana and the baby were safe. She was all he saw.

His baby!

Sirius had thought after a while that Harry might return to the sadness that had taken him since he had found out that Ariana was so ill but he did not. It was as if he could not. Not now that he knew he was having a baby.

Somehow, Harry knew Ariana would wake up. The three of them would be together one day. He didn't know when. But one day.

"I am proud of you Harry James," said Sirius to him. Suddenly Harry looked up to see his godfather was crying with joy and pride. As ever for them, life wasn't perfect. But if it was, then it would not be half as interesting.

Harry was indeed going to be a young father – but too young? Maybe not.

Harry knew Sirius was going to stand by him now more than he ever had before. As their eyes met Harry rose up and jumped into his arms. The two begun laughing with joy.

"Not only am I proud of you but I know Prongs would be too. You are doing the right thing Harry, and I love you so much for it kid. So much."

-

"She's having a baby?" the light was dim in the common room. Harry, Ron and Hermione were the only ones left up. He had made them stay up so that he could tell them news, just the three of them. As the three sat in chairs by the fire, Ron and Hermione tried to take in the news they had just heard.

"Yes."

"Are you pleased?" asked Ron. He was thrilled for his mate if he was.

"Yeah, you know what I really am." Harry nodded in a sort of dream state. He hadn't been able to stop smiling, and while knowledge of the pregnancy was not widely known, everyone knew there had been

a change in her condition. It was the only thing that could have brought Harry round.

“Well, then congratulation are in order.” Said Hermione as she drew him into a bone crushing hug. The idea of them having a baby when she was so ill defied all logic, but at the same time Hermione felt warm when she thought about it. Harry was the happiest she had ever seen him.

“Do you know if it is going to be a boy or a girl?” asked Ron.

“Not yet.”

“What do you want?”

Harry looked thoughtful. He had thought about it but not seriously. His son or his daughter. Both the image of a little boy or his and Ari's and what their little girl could look like had formed in his head. They were like twins and he knew he couldn't chose between them. Not till he knew for sure.

“I don't think I care. Just as long as he or she is healthy. That'll be enough.”

Both of them nodded with grins on their face. And it was then Harry knew to ask them. He had been planning to wait till later on but – it was the right moment.

“Listen you guys, Sirius has been great. I'm beginning to realise how important he has been in my life since he came back. I want my kid to have that, so...whether it's a boy or a girl; I want you two to be its godparents.”

Ron swallowed down a lump in his throat as he nodded. Hermione burst into tears. ‘Yes’ would have done, but those were the reactions that Harry would remember for the rest of his life. He really did have the two best friends in the world.

-

Poppy, Aberforth and Albus strolled about the lake. They were aware of course that Harry could not be more delighted. It seemed to give him hope that he was going to get her back. But they weren't so sure, and nothing could remove the raincloud from her big brothers lives.

"I have come up with a theory now." Said Poppy. After weeks of reading and trying to get to the bottom what the problem was she was not much closer. But she did have an idea and she knew both Dumbledore's needed to gear something soon or they were going to go mad too.

"Ariana's subconscious has been appalled by what she did. Even if she had the logic to reason that she did not mean to harm her mother, which she may or may not have – we're simply not sure; the blow has appeared to have shocked her into herself. If I may use the analogy of an angel and a devil that might be the best way of explaining things. Ariana's sanity is arguing against her insanity. She may be able to logically explain things till herself, but it is unlikely she will accept that explanation, which I should imagine she will see as an excuse for what she did, not a reason. Until she can accept what she has done and deal with it, it is unlikely, if I am right that she is going to come about. In other words she could come around tomorrow," She told them gravely. "However, it might also take years for her reason herself back to life. But as I said, it remains, at best a theory."

Aberforth nodded. It sounded to him like a very woolly theory indeed. But it was something to cling too. He only wished she could wake up so they could talk about it together. Albus and himself could bring her about. Make her see it was not her fault.

"And the baby? Will it be affected?" Aberforth questioned.

"We hope not. Healer Tusker agrees Ariana's physically healthy enough to carry the child and bring it in to the world, though not naturally perhaps. If she is in the coma still, she will have to have a caesarean." She explained. "She is definitely keeping the child then?" She asked tentatively, knowing there had been discussion between the brothers of a different outcome.

“Yes. Harry didn’t even have to think about it and neither of us have the right to choose an abortion for her. We just have to hope for the best now. It is all we can do.” Albus sighed heavily. He was over a hundred years old and he was to become an uncle.

As he shook his head, they continued on their walk. The future was uncertain, to say the least.

But up in the castle, for the first time in weeks, laughter rung in Harry Potter’s ears as he talked, hoped and planned.

For the first time ever, he was going to have a blood relation who he could love unreservedly, and as he crawled into bed that night he allowed himself a smile as he imagined his Ariana, in her lilac dress, with her hair down, a child on her hip as she walked towards him. She was quite sane and a smile spread across her face.

One day, that image would be a reality he promised himself.

Please Review!

Chapter 55

From that day there was a change in Harry. The January days of depression were gone. He still suffered as he longed for the return of Ariana but this baby... it was as if she was telling him there was still hope.

There would be a new start for the three of them.

And so the changer begun in his life. Harry begun to live by the rule work hard, play hard. When Hermione went to the library mole often than ever before he went with her. He had to get his exams. The approaching OWLS seemed more important than ever. He had to get a good job when he eventually finished school (whether that came before or after beating Voldemort he was not yet sure). He was going to have three months to feed, after all. But he also trained harder when the Gryffindor team went out to train. This he knew was going to be his last year on his house team. When he was not working next year he was going to be Ariana and the baby.

A brilliant future was ahead of him for the first time in weeks.

A family to call his own. In truth it was beyond his wildest dreams.

Other aspects of his school life also intensified. The defence group that they had begun was widen out so that many more students came to the now illegal meetings. Sirius helped them more indirectly also. Though he wanted to carry on leading them, Harry insisted he did not. He had to keep his post at Hogwarts. That was an absolute necessity. Harry didn't know how he would cope with out his god father there to help him now.

The group had now been named, in honour of the ministry's fear, 'Dumbledore's army.' It was quiet fitting they felt.

Like any other expectant father he supposed he begun to count down the days till the arrival of the little one. It was due early in the second half of august. That meant he was only going to have two weeks with the new born till he went back to school. He wished he could have more time with them.

Of course the option of him not returning had been discussed between himself, the Dumbledore brothers and Sirius. All three grown men, even Aberforth, had put a stop to that idea. With Voldemort gaining power this was not a good time for the chosen one to put an end to the only thing that could prepare him for what lied ahead. No Ariana had been taken out of education. Harry had to continue with his.

The baby would be in the care of Sirius for most of the time it seemed the decisions had been made. Should some miracle occur that meant Ariana was well enough to care for her child by the time it was born, it would of course stay with her and Aberforth in the school term. But Aberforth had even admitted he was not up to caring for the new born and his sister at once, and as usual for him, Ariana came first.

So the responsibility of the overall care of the child came down to Sirius Black who had to say he was rather looking forward to it. He was going to be able to do everything for the baby that he had not been able to do for its father.

He had his doubts about the child, for sure. His teenage godson he had wanted to look after now had someone to look after himself. But it was nothing to worry about. Harry had coped better than anyone could had predicated when he got the news and his enthusiasm had not failed him yet. No, he was sure having a baby was not as hard as fighting Voldemort. And Harry had already met him four times. Each and every time, he had survived.

Baby Dumbledore-Potter should be a piece of pumpkin pie.

-

Aberforth walked into the room. Healer Tusker was doing changing Ariana drip again and she had called him in. As accustom as the two were becoming of one another Aberforth found he did not have the emotional energy left to like or dislike her. He had too much on his mind.

Going into the room, he slumped down into the arm chair that had been placed by her bed which was now where he spent the majority of his days. Albus had told him repeatedly he didn't think it was a good idea to dwell so much on what had gone on, and that if he wanted to, perhaps going to the pub for a few hours would actually do him some good. But it was as if he couldn't do it. Physically he could not walk away or leave her. He had never been one to self pity, but now it was all he could do as he watched the unmoving body on the bed.

The only difference between the Ariana who had arrived at Grimmauld place and the Ariana who lay before him now was that her stomach seemed slightly more inflated. There was no question of it.

Ariana had a baby bump.

He was turning all of it over in his brain daily but he just couldn't find the logic that he knew Potter and Black had found. Even Albus had come about to the idea of the baby but he could not. It felt wrong for the girl he had thought of as his child for so long to be having one herself.

Of course that was what she was. She was more a daughter than a sister to him now. Maybe if he had been a bit freer with her then this would not have happened. He knew it was useless to blame himself (she certainly would not let him) but he did. Though that said, not as much as he blamed the Potter boy.

He knew this had not been Harry's intention but he was the root of this. If he had kept her out of school from the start...

The fact remained that he was selfish when it came to her, because he didn't want to share her. Not with any one, least of all a baby and her boy friend.

Tears trickled down. He wanted to be young again. He wanted her to be four or five and he wanted them to be best friends once more. He wanted them to play all day together, then have their mother call them in for tea. Half way through the meal he wanted their father

would join them once he was in from work and kiss them all lovingly as he sat by his wife and ask if his children had had a good day. Albus would precede to dominate the conversation and him and Ariana would pass sniggers between them when he was too pompous.

Things had been so simple then. So why and how had they got so complicated now?

Uncomfortably, he reached out and took her hand.

And so the wait for her continued.

A/n: Sorry for such a short chapter, I had to put the information in but it didn't fit together nicely with the next. However, I felt I had to move the story along. I am slowly getting towards the end now. Looking over my plan, this story should total at 63/4 chapters. Next chapter has plenty more too it, I promise.

Please review!

Chapter 56

The image of Kingsley Shacklebolt falling through the veil continued to haunt Harry. He had barely known the man but he had seen him die. At sixteen, nearer seventeen, that was a hard thing to watch and digest. Even as he made breakfast for himself back at Privet Drive he found he could not shake the image from his head.

The Department of Mysteries ... Voldemort...

The school year had come to an end and once again he was stuck with the Dursleys for company. The Dursleys who knew nothing of who he was and nothing of his life. Nothing of what was expecting.

Frustration was pumping through his veins like red hot lava. He should not have to be there after everything that had gone on. Everything that was still going on.

It was the middle of July...soon to be the end... his birthday....hers... the middle of August... the baby's...

Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia looked at him funny. If he wasn't in the foulest of all moods then he seemed to be near delirium with joy. As Harry picked up his bowl of cereal, he headed up the stairs reminding himself that in a mere five days he was going to be able to go back and join the wizarding world and spend an entire, blissful month at her side.

Sleeping beauty, as he had taken to calling her after the muggle fairy tale.

Sitting on the worn mattress he sighed, and spooned up the last of his corn flakes. He would do his homework for the rest of the day; it helped take his mind off things he found. The good, as well as the bad.

He longed for Sirius, for Hermione, for Ron and for Ariana. Especially Ariana. He seemed so far from them.

But he did have a few things that helped with the enforced separation. There was one thing that helped more than anything. The scan of the baby.

The picture was as with every in the wizarding world a moving one, yet with baby scans it was different. The picture could be described as a constant ultra sound as the picture moved when the baby did, or in this case, Harry's little daughter did.

His daughter.

He had been asked on the second scan if he had wanted to know or not. Aberforth, Albus and Sirius had been there with him but had left the decision to him. He had had no idea if Ariana would have wanted it to be surprise or not, but he decided he wanted to know so he could begin to prepare himself for life with his child.

They had been told by Tusker they were having a girl.

Harry sighed in relief feeling the tension go from his muscles. The thought of them relaxed him. Soon enough he was going to be with the baby and her mother. The three of them, their very own little family. They were going to be safe when they were cocooned in each other's love.

The fact they were having a baby was not common knowledge though. In fact, only the Order and the Weasley's had been told. The professors who were not in the Order at Hogwarts had not been told, neither had the majority of Harry's dorm mates. No, she was a secret and she was going to have to remain so. After all, if Voldemort heard Harry had a child of his own, Harry was certain she and her mother were going to be as much his targets as the Boy Who Lived was himself. Lily and James had been.

No, it was much safer that the two of them were a secret.

There had already been much speculation about Ariana's abrupt disappearance from the wizarding world though. When her brothers had taken her out of school it was apparent that something was wrong to every reader of the Prophet, but when she had gone from

the public eye completely it had been worse. It was made clear to the public that it was something to do with Albus and that it had to be something dark in the opinion of the Ministry. Or it had been before the events in Department of Mysteries. Fudge had loved laying into Ariana and it had infuriated Harry. It had been made worse also when the Hogshead was left in temporary care when Aberforth left to be with Ariana. Not that Aberforth cared of course.

But that had changed now. When it became obvious to the whole of the wizarding world that Voldemort had come back the press had rapidly laid off the Dumbledores. There had been very little to do with her written lately which of course Harry was grateful for. He didn't want people talking about her when she was none of their business.

He just wanted to be with the two of them. The three of them...

And so he sat on his bed, looking up at the scan of his gorgeous little girl and shut his eyes, hoping that his love for them was going to be enough to get him through the next few days.

He had just found some peace however, when Hedwig returned. He had assumed she had been out hunting for a couple of nights, but when he looked she returned with letters on her leg.

Harry gave her a grateful look. At last, some news.

With an affectionate nip, she let him take the letters before taking off to her cage for a much needed drink.

Harry ripped open the first of the two letters.

Dear Harry,

I know this enforced separation is going to be doing your head in, but don't worry. Not long now. Just a quick note to say that everything is ok and not to worry. Pomfrey and Tusker examined Ariana today and mother and baby are still doing well.

It won't be long till your back with us,

Love Padfoot.

His words were comforting even if they did make Harry feel mad with jealousy. He wanted to be the one writing to Sirius saying all was well.

He looked at the next.

Harry,

Just got to Grimmauld Place today. Sirius has sent a letter already but forgot to mention that the bits you ordered for the nursery came yesterday. Mr Weasley brought them over! Sirius thought you would want to know. When you get here, we can start the decoration!

Can't wait for you to get here (or the baby!),

Lots of love,

Hermione .

He had a lot of good friends about him and he knew it. No one seemed more excited than Hermione though. She was going to be a doting god mother that was for sure. He wondered if Ron was going to even get a look in when it came to the child.

Of course, she was no longer the child in his head. He had finally decided on the name the night before.

There were several obvious choices. Ariana being one of them, though he didn't think she would want their baby to have her name. She would say the baby was its own person and should therefore have its own name. Kendra was another choice, but the unhappy connotations with that name seemed now to overrule the good it had done Ariana.

So then he came to Lily. He wanted to name his child after his own mother more than anything else, but of course Aberforth would think it another example of him being egotistic. Another reason he was unsuitable and unworthy of his sister's love. He didn't want to give the

old man another reason to turn against him. He had quite enough of those already.

So he had decided on Lily for her second name, not her first.

Her first name was going to go along with a Dumbledore tradition. Albus, Aberforth, Ariana... Alice.

Alice Lily.

Yes, his daughter would be Alice Lily. There was only one thing that could change that. If for some strange and beautiful reason that her mother came back in time to tell him she didn't like it.

-

Aberforth found that time past slower the nearer they got to the birth. There were times when he was sitting with his sister that he thought hours must have past when only half had. And then there was days that went so fast that he could barely register them.

And here they were. A month from the birth.

He had eventually got used to the idea that there was going to be another Dumbledore soon to join their family. It didn't seem so awful now. But that didn't mean he liked the idea. It merely meant that he was going to try and get past his unhappiness for the sake of his niece.

Ariana, he had thought, always felt she could come to him. In the end he had found out that wasn't the case but the least he could do for her now was help her baby when it came into the world.

In a few days, Harry was going to be there. He had to at least be civil to him even if he did not want to be. Sirius had after all been so good about the baby and letting them have the house (even if it was now Order Headquarters as well). Still the Fidelius Charm was protecting them, and with Albus as Secret Keeper he was not worried about the three of them being safe.

All they had to do now was wait.

Going down into the kitchen intent on getting a cup of tea (with maybe something a bit stronger to lace it) he longed for the days when he had peace there. With most of the Order, the entire Weasley family and Miss Granger there, he didn't get five minutes to himself often and Mrs Blacks portrait was going off alarming worse than ever before.

Asides from that though, he suppose at times they could be rather good company (when they were less noisy). He had been alone with his sister for too long. Albus had been right when he had said to him time away from her could help. Now that his day was split up by healthy dollops of human company and conversation, things were getting easier to cope with. Or in other words, after over half a year, he had become accustom to the fact he had lost her once more.

"How is she today Mr Dumbledore?" asked Ginny as he went in.

"The same as she was yesterday," he said grumpily. Ginny shot a look of apology to Hermione who shrugged. She was beginning to get used to Aberforth. He never seemed so moody with her as he was with the others. Maybe it was because he knew how well she had got on with his sister. No, if he had a favourite of his sister's friends, then it was Miss Granger. But then, she had never disclosed to him the 'help' she had given Ariana last year.

"There'll be a big change when the baby comes though." Said Hermione who was thoroughly ready to play the part of the fairy god mother. She had thought so much about it since they had broken up from school. She knew he had found it a strain to come to terms with but she had most definitely not. After the end of the school year with what happened to Kingsley Shacklebolt it was what they all needed.

Something positive. Something innocent. Something pure.

"I think even we were able to work that one out for ourselves Hermione." Said Sirius as he came into the room. He knew he should not take it out on her but he was beginning to miss Harry more and

more now. Stupid blood protection. It was cruel that he should not be there in the run up to his own child's birth.

The only blood relative he needed was there in the house. At least that was among the pros of Harry having a child so young. When she arrived, she would have Lily's blood in her veins. No more Dursleys ever again.

When Harry got there, Sirius was sure that his mood was going to improve. Until then, he also knew he could not be that shot at every one in the house. "I'm sorry Hermione. I didn't mean to snap." He said to her much more gently.

"It's ok," she told him. She knew he was only worried. God knows they all had enough reason to be in that day and age.

"I am going to go and clear out the rest of the nursery – get it ready for Harry to decorate," he said to them, sure that his godson was going to find it quite therapeutic. He remembered he had when he had helped Lily and James do his up.

Aberforth had helped him considerably. Getting the room ready for the baby with everyone else had been a bit of a welcome break from sitting by his sister every day, in the silence.

There was not much he would not do to just have her back for a moment though. Just to hear her say his name.

'Aba.'

How he ached for her even when she was in the same room.

Still it was not long till he found himself going back up the stairs to help the rest of them get the remaining grime out of the room. All the dark objects had been removed days ago.

Part of him wondered just how much point there was to them all doing the room up. After all, not long after her birth, the baby was going to go under the guise of Sirius's daughter to Hogwarts so that she could be with her father in the term.

But it was something that they could do to keep themselves occupied.

And so as soon as they got in to the room, a bit of music was turned on and they stripped away the last of the old dingy wall paper (which was sure to be replaced with something a lot brighter), wiped down the walls and sanded the floor. They did this all the muggle way. For Sirius, it appeared to have become a labour of love more than anything else.

It was as Hermione turned down the wireless to ask if anyone wanted another coffee or tea when the door opened frantically.

It was Tusker.

“What happened?” asked Sirius and Aberforth simultaneously on the alert immediately.

“The baby’s distressed. We don’t know why but it is best we get her out of there as soon as we can.”

-

Harry had been quite calm until twenty minutes passed with Alice making practically no movement at all. He was beginning to get rather worried. Even when she had been sleeping she had not been so still.

He sat in his room trying to think of what to do. Write to Sirius? That was most definitely an option, though it would take too long though. But he was there and Sirius was already with Tusker. If anything was really wrong then he was sure to know before Harry did.

He had begun to pace when he heard a commotion down stairs. It sounded as if the door had been blown off its hinges.

He was on his guard most of the time these days and so automatically, he grabbed his wand from the bed as he moved towards the door. He was sure if the explosion had been that loud, then it was not going to be anything to do with the muggle world.

Creeping out on to the landing, he heard voices.

"I have to see Harry! Now!"

Before Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia or Dudley had time to protest he was down the stairs. The well known voice of Remus Lupin was laced with concern.

As he came into view, the werewolf glanced over him.

"You have to come now. It's the baby." He told him.

Harry bounded up the stairs to get his things. He had known something was wrong with her, he had known it!

"What baby?" he heard Uncle Vernon ask. But neither wizard cared to explain. They had to get back to Headquarters as soon as they could. Harry was not going to miss the birth of his little daughter.

-

As soon as he got to the living room of Grimmauld place Harry found he was swiftly encased in his god fathers loving embrace. It was quite obvious that the caesarean, which had in the end been a necessary procedure, was not yet over. Neither mother nor daughter was out of danger.

Hermione looked as if she had been crying. This was not how it was meant to be.

Alice was meant to have stayed put for another month.

"Why can nothing ever just go as it is suppose to?" he naively asked the elder marauder who held on to Harry more firmly.

Looking about the room, he also noted that the two Dumbledore brothers were there. They looked as if they were two lions who had been caged. They were desperate to get into the room as well, just like him, but Harry didn't doubt that the baby was not at the fore front of their minds. No, all they wanted was confirmation that there sister

was ok or as well as she could be. Her well being was the most important thing to them.

Oh, how he wanted to hold her. Ariana... his beautiful loving Ariana. He shut his eyes as he remembered how she had looked that night when they had made their child. She had been so beautiful. Beyond beautiful. And then in the morning she had been so sweet. She was just lovely. But at times it seemed as she had been a dream now. She had been his dream.

It had dawned on him that the worse might come. It could happen. But if he could only have one then he did not know who he would choose. They both meant the world to him. They were his world. Impossible as it was, there were three halves to his whole. Thankfully that choice was not going to fall to his lot. No, the only thing that could decide that was fate.

Please.... let them be ok...please...

The tension had never been so great and Harry found he was suffocating. There was nothing he could do for her. There was no way that this time, when he really needed too, that he could play the hero. Just when his girls needed him the most.

Memories of their time together pervaded his mind.

He remembered the way the snow had settled on her hair.

The way that she had worn her dresses proudly, even when others had mocked her.

But most of all he remembered the way she had loved him. Every day. He never felt as if she had taken what the two of them shared for granted. He hoped he had done the same thing for her.

A cry from the next room interrupted his thoughts. A very little cry. The cry of a newborn baby. Specifically, the cry of his newborn baby.

He raised his head and looked about at the others. Through sheer relief, Lupin, Sirius, Ron, Hermione, Mrs Weasley and Albus had

begun to cry. Aberforth still looked too concerned and as he met Harry's eyes they knew what the other was thinking...

The baby it seemed was out of danger, but what of her mother?

The two minutes in which the nurses checked the child before bringing her out to meet her father seemed to last a life time. It was in the end Madame Pomfrey who opened the door and brought the bundle of pink blankets out to him.

"She's early, and therefore a bit on the small side Mr. Potter. But there is no doubt in my mind that she is going to be ok. Congratulations, you have a baby girl."

And in that single moment when he took his child in his arms for the first time it was as if nothing else mattered. For a split second, not even Ariana mattered. Because here she was. After months of waiting and anticipation, baby Alice Lily was in his arms. She was ok. She was his. They were family, father and daughter together at last.

Bending down, he dropped both an emotional tear and a loving kiss into her mass of black baby hair. It was fluffy.

Harry could hardly control his emotions. He felt as if he was going to burst with pride. He wanted to show everyone in the world how clever he was. He had helped make this little girl. This beautiful little girl. She was half his. It was as if he was the first man to ever father a child. He just felt ecstatic.

She opened her little eyes, and his wish was fulfilled. There they were. Ariana's beautiful, sparkling blue eyes. So like her mothers...

Ariana....

"Is she ok?" he asked nodding towards the door.

"Miss Dumbledore is as well as can be expected. The caesarean was an ordeal, but there is no reason why she should not make a complete recovery."

“And is she awake?” he begged to know. Was she there? After eight months had she come back to him with her daughter?

Slowly and sadly, the nurse shook her head.

The intense sadness he felt that the love of his life had not returned with their child was mixed with the absolute joy that being a father had given him.

All Harry could do then was cry.

Please review!

Chapter 57

Having settled down into a chair, Harry only took his eyes off of his child to see Aberforth abandon the room in order to reach his sister side. He didn't think he had even stopped to take a glance of his new niece.

The others certainly did.

Albus Dumbledore had not felt this happy for a long time. If Aberforth was with Ariana, he told himself, then she was going to be ok. Crouching down in front of Harry and the blanket, with the flexibility of a much younger man, he looked into the blanket. He had not seen such a little one in quite some time. And she was part of his family. She was his flesh and blood, and while he had been aghast when he had learned she was on her way he felt nothing but joy now she was here.

"You have been blessed Harry," he told him though he knew Harry did not need to be told that. It was written all over him that he knew this was the biggest blessing he had ever had. Perhaps the only.

Harry nodded but it was clear he was torn. He didn't wasn't to have to share this moment with all of them. He only wanted to share it with Ariana and that was what his eyes were screaming.

Sirius took the seat by his side and put his arm about Harry. He supposed, to all intents and purposes, this made him a grandfather. Granddad Sirius.

He liked that.

Despite the fact that she had her mother's eyes, he could see Harry in the baby quite easily, and so he could also see James and Lily.

"Oh Harry," he sighed with joy.

"Sirius, I have to go and see Ariana, can you take her?" he said motioning to give him the blankets, giving Alice another kiss before he let her go. He decided to break the trance quickly that he was in

with his child. He didn't want to, but he had to check on Ariana. He had to see her mother, check she was ok.

Albus and him made for the door at the same time and arrived just as Tusker let Aberforth sit by Ariana and instantly he took her hand.

"How is she?" asked Harry desperately. He didn't think he had ever wanted her back quite as much as he did in that moment. She should be awake and she should be there to hold her daughter. Alice should be in her mother's loving arms by now.

"She is ok." Aberforth replied in a monotone voice.

But how could that be when she was clearly not alright. She might have no idea she had even been pregnant, let alone did they know if she realised she had had a baby.

"I thought – the baby... it would bring her back to me." Harry said as he felt his throat getting together and tighter. Why hadn't she awoken?

"We all did," mourned Aberforth as he looked at the boy who he supposed he had to count among his family now. That had been his hope as well. More than anything else.

Aberforth had thought if she had had a daughter then the issues she had with her own mother might for a time at least be forgotten. If she knew she could put it behind her and focus on what had to be the most important thing now.

"I love her." Croaked out Harry. It was said more to Aberforth than to anyone else. He had to know that. This new baby. It could be a new start for them all - he hated how the old man and he were always at one another's throats. They were quite possibly the two people who loved her most in the world and so they should be working together. Not trying to tear one another apart by playing 'I-love-Ariana-the-most'. It was time to put the past behind them, for both the girls' sakes.

"I know you do." It was time that he accepted that as fact.

Harry, with tears dropping on to his cheeks all the time, went over to the body of the sleeping Ariana and kissed her forehead. He could feel her breathing on his face as he leant down. She was still there. She wasn't really gone from him. She would not be forever.

He had to believe that she was going to come back to him now more than ever before. He didn't know when it was going to be but it was going to happen.

"Thank you." He whispered to her gently stroking her cheek with his thumb. "She is so lovely – in fact, she is just like her mum." He said as he saw a tear drop on to her cheek. He wiped it away. It looked as if she had been crying and he couldn't stand the thought of it. He wished her brothers would bugger off and give the two of them a moment. But neither would take the hint and he decided he would return to her when they were gone. There was so much he wanted to say to her. They had so many plans to make. "Sweetheart, she is wonderful and I'll keep her safe until you are back with us I promise."

With that, and with great effort, he left her side. He had to get back to his daughter.

-

Sirius had to say he was delighted when he heard the name that Harry had picked for his child. Not only did it pay homage to both sides of her family, it also truly fitted her.

She looked like an Alice Lily.

As they sat in the living room, Harry had a fire whiskey with Sirius (to wet the baby's head) and watched as Hermione and Ron doted over their god child. Somehow even though she had been born far too early it felt right that she should have come.

Now he had a whole six weeks with her before her went to school.

"I can't really believe she's here yet." He said to his godfather. There was so much to take in.

"I know. Neither can I. But you will, after a good few sleepless nights." Sirius teased him. "You're not alone in this though Harry. We are all going to be with you and little Alice all the way." He said to him.

Harry nodded gratefully.

"Harry... she so beautiful." said Hermione as she brought his daughter back to him and he gratefully took her back into his arms.

"I know. She is the spitting image of her mother." he said as he looked down on her. She was going to be a constant reminder of everything he was fighting for. This was why Voldemort had to die. So that she could grow up in peace.

It was at that moment though she begun to cry.

"What did I do?" he questioned the others, panicked.

"Nothing. She wants her bottle most likely. Are you hungry baby?" asked Hermione. "I'll go get it, Mrs Weasley said she was making some formula up for her."

As she left the room it dawned on him. He had no idea what he was doing, and he was without Ariana in all of this.

"Sirius until she gets back I am a single dad, aren't I?" he asked. And while he refused to believe that she was never going to come back to him after all they had been through together, there was a very real possibility that Alice might grow up not knowing what a wonderful person her mother was.

"Not while I am here you're not."

The two set about trying to comfort the crying baby, knowing that they were going to be two of the most important people in her little life. Harry seemed to be discovering new things about her all the time already. Her finger nails were so small, her eyes so bright...

Was this what Lily and James had thought when they had first held him close?

Was it the same from every parent?

“You are going to get through this. I promise you.”

In no time at all it seemed Hermione had come back with the bottle of formulised milk and Harry had settled into the arm chair. His small daughter now had a baby grow on and as she drunk her small hand settled on top of her fathers. In truth she was a complete and utter darling.

Protecting her seemed to have given life a new meaning in the hour she had been alive. He had someone to fight for now.

And so as she drifted off to sleep, unaware that her mother was so absent in mind from her baby, the baby felt warm and content in her father's love. Alice was for now completely dependent on Harry.

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By that evening magic had been enlisted to get the nursery up to scratch. It had been a nice idea to do it by hand but now she had come, it had to be ready for her, not that Sirius was even sure she was going to be in there a lot. Harry had said that they were to put her crib in his room. After all, it was going to be him doing the night feeds. She might as well sleep by him.

The summer promised nothing if it was not going to be a trying one.

Harry had been so sure that he was going to see Ariana awake. He couldn't get his head round it. They had a child of their own now. She had to forgive herself for what she had done to her mother and allow herself to be part of her new family.

Until she did that, they were not going to be complete as a unit.

He would spend his days between the two of them. It was all he could do. Ariana and Alice both needed him.

-

Albus Dumbledore was as ever, a man with a lot on his mind. For the first time ever, he found that what went on in the Order now affected his family in a very real way. Ari's well being had always been a completely different matter to the Order of the Phoenix and would have remained so, had it not been for her involvement with a certain Chosen One. As he considered all he knew or all he thought he knew about Voldemort, and how they were going to rid the wizarding world of him forever... he realised he had to make a choice.

The Horcruxes. If that was what Tom, had done to himself... If Harry himself did hold the last part of Voldemort... Then would he condemn his niece's father to death?

Harry James Potter was part of his family now. If anything happened to that boy then it was most likely neither Ari and little Alice would forgive him.

But if it was the only way? Could he allow his sister to be happy and sacrifice the rest of wizarding world? He didn't know..

Having returned to Hogwarts castle, he tried to figure out what was the right thing for do. What really would bring about the greater good?

The words that had haunted him his whole life seemed to fight the situation he was in. Aberforth could look after the two girls if the worst came to the worst, he mused. But then...

He felt as if he had taken so much from her already.

The fate of the wizarding world...

He thought of what Snape had been reporting of late. There was no doubt in his mind that things were going to take a much darker turn soon. Draco Malfoy had been given a mission.

The fact was he was once again facing the devastating choice between his family and what he thought was the right thing to do.

He didn't know where to turn.

-

Aberforth had not left his sisters sides since he had been let back into the room after the birth. She seemed as she had been – no change. The birth had not affected her condition at all. Not in the slightest.

What Harry had said had had an effect on him though. He had been sure she was coming back to him. He was desperate for her back. Well, he had always been told he had underestimated Potters love for her. Now, on this day, the day of the birth of his niece he was forced to accept it.

Getting up slowly from his chair, he brushed back his sister's hair from her face tenderly and kissed her forehead before leaving the room. It was time he met his niece.

Walking downstairs, he found that the proud godfather of his niece had her in his arms while Harry looked on with a smile on his face. Ron Weasley he supposed was not the greatest brain of his age but he was a good lad with what Aberforth would call a sturdy head on his shoulders. He was a good role model. Not the best, but a good one. He was sure Ron had the best of intentions.

When Harry saw that he had come into the room, he tensed a little. He didn't think that he was ever going to get used to him or be comfortable in his presence, but they had called a truce.

"Can I meet my niece please Harry?" he asked, the gruff voice laced with thick and pure emotion.

Gently, Harry nodded, and tenderly he took the girl from her godfather's arms she had been sleeping in.

"Of course you can," he said to him as he looked down on her, enjoying every second he had her in his own arms. The affection, love and pride he felt for his daughter radiated down on her as he admired her. He didn't think that he would tire of looking at her. Ever. "Alice, I want you to meet your Uncle. This is Uncle Aberforth." He explained.

Aberforth had almost feared her when he had seen her at first - when he had really looked at her. He supposed due to her early birth she was smaller than a lot of babies were, but truly, she just seemed tiny. He had a sudden urge in his heart to protect this child. She was a part of him.

As she was transferred into his arms though she opened her eyes. He had not been expecting to see Ariana looking back at him. The comparison was uncanny. Oh yes, there was no doubting the fact that this child was indeed a Dumbledore.

She looked at him intently as if she knew him and was trying to place him. But, of course, there was a chance she did know him already. It had been him by his sister side all the way through the pregnancy. He had been the one talking to the two of them. Telling the two of them they were loved, commenting on the news or reading a book out loud. She knew his voice. She knew him.

"Hello baby Alice." Instantly one of her podgy hands was raised towards him. Though she was not strong enough yet to bring it up to him, what she had done had confirmed to him everything he had already known about his little one. She knew him, the same way he knew her. Because this was his sister's daughter and he knew her mother by heart, just as well as he knew her by sight. Settling down in an arm chair that was near the fireplace, he realised that while he adored holding this little one close to him, it hurt.

She was another piece of Ariana that he could not make sense of. He could not converse with this child. It gave him no answers as to why his sister had done what she had. He had hoped for answers when he held her. He got none. Swiftly, he grazed his lips gently over her brow. He had to treat her as her own person. Not merely as an extension of her beloved mother.

"Welcome to the family, little one." He said to her. He did not cry, and he would not here. Later perhaps, but not now. "She is a fine girl Harry Potter. You watch out for her," he told him.

The threat that was unsaid hung in the air. If he did not treat the girl right, then he was going to have him to answer too.

Harry nodded. He had every intention of treating her right.

Alice Lily over the next few days was the centre point and focus of life at Grimmauld Place. The little girl was surrounded with warmth and love. Whether it was because they were her family (her father, granddad, uncles and godparents) or whether they thought she was just 'so cute' (like Tonks), there was always someone wanting to cuddle her. Harry found he had to take her up to 'their' room to have a little time out with his daughter. Either that or there favourite hide out was Ariana's room.

As he watched Ariana sleep there was guilt and an overwhelming sadness that took over him. There was no what he could live as he had been again, as a zombie. Breathing, but not living. No Alice took away not only the choice, but the chance of that. He delighted in every move she made and every changing expression on her tiny face. But the fact that Ariana was not there to see it killed him inside. He felt guilty that he was with her and she was not. And what a mother he thought she would make. She would be kind and gentle, and she would dote on their daughter.

Spoil her in fact - and she had Aberforth and Sirius for. But Harry was sure she was missing her mother's love. She had not heard her voice. Not once when she had been with child had she been able to rub her hand lovingly over the bump that had been Alice. But they had been together. One for near an entire nine months. That had to secure some sort of bond didn't it?

All babies experience the warmth of mother, didn't they? Even if Lily had not brought him up, when he had been born she had been there to hold him tight and tell him how much he meant to her.

She had had the opportunity that had been robbed of both of Ari.

And so in the middle of the night he headed down to the kitchen with his screaming daughter in his arms. He didn't know whether it was a bottle or her mother she was crying for as he thought it quite likely

she was going to be grieving for the women who should be there, who should be so omnipresent in her life.

“Ok, it’s ok my darling.” He muttered as he held the newborn to his chest and begun to heat the bottle, the muggle way. He was going to be so glad when he came of age. It was going to make parenthood so much easier!

Sirius, as good as his word, came down to join them when he heard Alice crying.

“How long do you think it is going to be before she goes through the night?” he asked his godfather.

“It could be a while yet Harry. You were seven months before James and Lily had a decent night’s sleep.” he informed him.

“I bet I did their heads in didn’t I?”

“No, I think in truth they liked it once you had settled and were having your bottle,” he said as he reached for Alice’s and checked it temperatures. “There is something about being up in the middle of the night with a content but awake baby...some very special moments.”

“Do you speak from experience?”

“Only once or twice.” He said but he nodded.

The fact that Sirius had been there from the off for him was meaning more and more to Harry as he got older. James and Lily had made the best decision of there lives when they had chosen him to be his godfather and he was eternally grateful for their decision now.

“Really?”

“Yes.”

Sirius watched with great love as Harry soothed Alice, who soon stopped crying and looked up at him with her bright eyes.

“Seems like someone is a bit of a daddy’s girl.” Teased Sirius.

“I hope so.” Harry whispered.

-

Harry’s summer was one of trial and error more than anything. Getting it right, and then wrong, then slowly figuring out what Alice liked and did not like, how she wanted to be rocked and not patted.

He watched her grow in that first month with such love and just a tinge of pain; for he was sure she looked like her mother just a little bit more with every passing day.

It was not just her he had to focus on though. It was his studies. Having got his results only to find he had nearly out shone even Hermione in the NEWTS (though not quite) he had to keep it up. When he got out of school he wanted to get the best job to provide Ariana and Alice with the best home he could. His parent’s fortune would not last long supporting the three of them. He didn’t want them to stay at Grimmauld Place forever either. They should have their own place. It was strange that even then he thought of mother and daughter as a package. You could not have one without the other. Even though he had not heard her voice in over eight months (nearing nine) there was not an hour of the day when she was not in his head.

And so that was how Harry Potter found himself in the living room of Grimmauld Place, his charms text books out in front of him studying with Ron, Hermione and Ginny. In the middle of the group on the floor, on her blanket Alice enjoyed kicking her legs about and successfully distracting her godmother from her work.

Hermione, who was usually so focused, could not take her eyes of the girl.

Ron, however, noted Harry was quiet. He had been out that day and he had returned only a couple of hours before. He had been out with Alice’s doting uncle Albus.

“So this Slughorn...” said Ron thinking on what he had already told him about where they had gone. “What do you think he is going to be like at teaching Defence?”

“I don’t know,” he said thoughtfully. “But let’s face it; he cannot be worse than Umbridge, can he?”

Please Review!

Chapter 58

Summer no matter how much of a learning curve it had been, was over far too soon. Not only for the new father but for all of the children who were going to be heading back to Hogwarts. Yet the wrench was of course greatest for Harry who knew his time with Ariana was going to be cut back to the least it had ever been. At least he had the great comfort Alice was going with him. All his free time had to be devoted to her from then on.

As he got out of the shower (having got up early enough to do so) he could hear that she was crying. His daughter he had found out was not a baby who cried a lot – only when she needed something.

“Ok baby, daddy’s coming,” he called to her. It was rare that she got left by herself. He had thought the others were in there rooms and were going to be keeping an ear out for her. As he struggled to get his towel on though, she did stop crying. Someone had got to her before him.

Drying off, he got his T shirt and jeans on that he was going to be going to Kings Cross Station in and walked back to his room to find that it was Ginny who had gone to his child’s aid. She had her in her arms and Alice, now a whole six weeks old was gurgling happily. Apparently, all she had wanted was a bit of attention.

“Oh Harry –“ said Ginny as she saw him, his hair still slightly wet. She hadn’t meant to intrude on his privacy. “Sorry it’s just she was crying –“

“It’s ok, in fact thank you. I hate it when she cries.” He said to her. She had done the right thing when she had done to her. Alice had never been left to cry.

Harry walked over to the bed to put the rest of his books in his trunk now that he could see the little one was content. Ginny took the hint and sat on the bed. Continuing to cradle the baby she placed a kiss on her forehead as the child’s father did the last of his packing.

"I can't believe we have to go back so soon!" she said to him. It seemed he was not the only one who was dreading go back to school.

"You must be looking forward to seeing Dean again though," he offered. They had been dating most of the summer from what he had heard.

Ginny merely shrugged. She felt her heart race just that little bit faster. She had never really given up hope...not even now he was a dad. He thought she liked someone else. It was probably for the best... he was definitely not on the market.

"Yes – I suppose it is going to be good to see him. You must be relieved to be taking her with you," she said referencing the girl in her arms. She wanted the subject changed none the less.

"Yeah I am. I mean it is not going to be easy to hear Sirius call her his daughter, but it is the way that we have to play the game if she is going to go to Hogwarts." He shrugged. If she had not been going back with him though, he seriously doubted that he would get on the train. They came as a pair now.

"We all know the truth though don't we? She's all you Harry – anyone can see it." She offered comfortingly.

"Yeah I suppose she is – though there is a lot of you mummy in your too isn't there?" he said as she gurgled. "Right you, come here – thanks Ginny," he said as he took her back in to his arms. "We had better get you dressed hadn't we if you are going to be spending the day with your uncle Aberforth before you come to school!" He said.

The plan had been set out that she would, of course, remain at Grimmauld Place while the others went to get the train, and then much later after the first years had been sorted Sirius would return to pick her up from her uncle, who would in turn divide his time that day between his sister and his niece.

Picking a yellow baby grow out of her draw in his room, he dressed her quickly (he was getting good at the whole parent thing) lifted her up in his arms and headed down to breakfast. Sirius has eaten

already and so insisted that his grandchild be passed over to him, so Harry could at least have five minutes to himself before he headed back off to school. Sirius had dropped the majority of his things back to his apartment the day before when he had also baby proofed his apartment. At the end of his bed, there was now a crib, and plenty of stuffed toys now shared the rooms he would be occupying with Alice.

Time went that morning for Harry far too quickly. He knew that he was going to be seeing his daughter in just a few hours but it wasn't going to make it any easier. It felt like goodbye which it was – to summer.

Of course, there was someone he was leaving he was not going to see for weeks. As Aberforth was down with the others at breakfast, as soon as he was done eating, he saw the window of opportunity and headed back up the stairs. Creeping into Ariana's room and walking over to the window, where he pulled back the curtains to throw light on the room. He did all this very quietly and then felt foolish. It was not as if he was going to wake her, was it?

"Morning love," he said as he took up the arm chair and held her hand. "You're a bit cold today aren't you?" he questioned. Rubbing her hand between his, he sighed. He wasn't going to get a response. "We're going back to school today, you know? Me, Ron, Hermione and Ginny so you mustn't worry if I am not here. It's just what with between my studies and looking after our daughter, time is going to be pretty lacking for trips home." He explained. "God, I am going to miss you. I am going to miss you so much." Repeating it only made the ache he had for her worse. "Even though you're not really here, it has been such a long time since I have not seen you at least once a day." He sighed. "You have to get about to waking up one of these days honey. I need you back now, more than ever. She's growing so fast – there is so much you need to know about her, about us. And then – I want to talk to you like I used to. There is stuff going on. Bad stuff, with Voldemort – the Death Eaters. Ron and Hermione are being helpful, and your brother's and Sirius are there for me whenever I need them. But they just aren't you and they don't see things in the same way.

“When you were first ill I could still hear your voice in my head telling me what to do, but it is getting weaker Ariana. That scares me more than anything else.” He admitted to her. “I am not and I never am going to be willing to lose you. So you just come back to me one day – I am still waiting.” He promised her.

Picking up her cold hand, he lifted it to his lips and blow warmth into it before letting go. It was so hard to leave her at times as he knew it would be so easy for him to lay down by her and just not get up for days at a time. All he wanted to do was hold her.

“It wasn’t your fault – you must forgive yourself.”

He had been about to sit back down and launch into another speech when he heard his daughter babbling downstairs. He had to spend a bit of time with her too. It was as if she was calling him, reminding him he had to go on. So, forcing his way out of the emotional binds that drew him to the bed and made him want to stay there forever, he took one last glance at her as he left the room.

He didn’t know when they were going to be back together.

As he went downstairs he could hear Molly Weasley fussing over them all as usual, it was nearly quarter past ten. They had to leave soon. Going over to Sirius, he took Alice and kissed her gently.

“Right, you be good for your uncle young lady, and daddy is going to see you when we get to Hogwarts tonight, ok? I bet you are probably going to see your uncle Albus too.” He still hated calling him by his first name, which the head of the Dumbledore family had begun to insist he did. As he pointed out on many an occasion, the two of them were family now.

Kissing her head he felt the desire to cling to her and never let her go. She was a piece of her mother that was not shut off to him and that was not going to be shut off to him. Her baby fluff hair tickled his cheek as he held her.

“Harry, time to go.” Sirius told him. Harry had never felt such an annoyance at his godfather. All he had wanted was five more minutes.

Aberforth was there though looking at them, ready to take over with Alice for the day. Placing another hurried kiss on her forehead he headed for the door with just a swift nod as a goodbye for Aberforth. He was not going to get upset in front of them.

No one spoke to him when they were in the car which he was grateful for – had he spoken he would have expressed a desire to run back into the house and never leave his family. But he had too. A hand reached out for his and not caring or looking to see who it belonged to he took it and held it, grateful that there was still some comfort in the world to be had.

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Aberforth, Ariana, Alice and Mrs. Weasley were the only ones left at Grimmauld Place by one o'clock that day. Molly, having returned from dropping off the children at the train station, had decided to stay behind to help clear up the mess the kids had made over summer (as most of them had been hers), before she made the mice with her husband back to The Burrow that evening.

She had to say it had been a strange summer indeed and had pulled out many emotions in many people - including herself.

Part of her, despite knowing how close he was to his godfather; saw Harry as one of her own, just as she did with Hermione. So to see him with a child so young she had to say had disturbed her. He had done an admirable job and she was proud of how he had dealt with it – but all the same, he was never going to just be a boy again now, was he? He had someone who was going to be relying on him day in and day out for the next twenty years.

Going down into the kitchen she saw Aberforth eating a sandwich, the baby dozing contently in his arms.

“How is she?” she asked him.

“Happy enough I think.” He said to her.

It was odd to have her to himself. He knew he had her till gone eight that evening, which was the longest he had ever spent with her – so to do so alone was a rather daunting, but at the same time he felt more relaxed around her when the others were not watching them the whole time.

In order to avoid the small talk he was in no mind to make with Molly, he soon climbed the stairs again, and went back into the room he spent most of his days in.

“Here she is Alice, here’s your mamma.” He told her.

Alice had spent quite a bit of time in the room where her mother slept as well. While Harry did come alone to his sister in the summer, he also knew that he had spent quite a bit of time in the room with mother and child both present.

If they continued this practise, it was Aberforth’s fervent hope that when she did come about Alice would feel the bond that was so right and natural between them. That Alice would know her mother, even if her mother did not know her.

Settling back into his chair for the afternoon, he kissed the baby’s brow. He had completely come about to her now to his own great surprise. When his sister had been pregnant to begin with the child, who he now loved so much, she had been merely Harry Potter’s brat to him. But Alice was his sister’s child for sure, to have got him round her little finger so fast. It was funny how things changed so quickly.

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As far as first of Septembers went for him, Harry had to admit this one had been pretty crummy. While it was not as bad as the one when he travelled up to school by train for his third year (he had had his first encounter with a Dementor), neither was it as good as the ones when he had spent his days leisurely on the Hogwarts lawns with Sirius.

Having his nose broken by Draco Malfoy had never been high on his ‘to do list’. And then he had seen Tonks, which wasn’t so bad.

However, she had looked awful. Then there was the Slug Club that he did not know how to perceive yet. He felt indifferent towards Slughorn who seemed to see people as trophy's rather than what they truly were. And while he was sure that she would not exactly dislike him, Slughorn to him seemed like the kind of person who Ariana would feel uncomfortable around.

No, all in all, by the time he got to the feast all he wanted to do was retreat to the relative safety of Sirius rooms (who looked at him puzzled when he got to the feast late). No doubt he would have to give him a blow by blow of events before he got to bed that night. The one pleasant thought he had in his head by the time that he sat down to eat with Hermione, Ron, Dean, Ginny and Neville was that it was not going to be so long until he was back in his godfathers rooms with his little girl back in his arms.

It was during the feast that Hermione informed him that when Albus had been making his welcome back speech, he had congratulated Sirius on the birth of his first child –Alice – thus the first stage of there plan to give her a disguise had been put into practice.

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Sirius was eager to get back to the school and to talk to Harry. Returning to Grimmauld Place was never on the top of his to do list but at least it was literally just for five minutes that time. Then he and 'his daughter' were going back to the safest castle in Europe.

Having no doubt what so ever about where they were going to be, he bounded up the stairs taking two at a time, to Ariana's room.

Creeping in he found Aberforth playing with his niece and in a moment of amusement just stopped, sure not to be seen by the aging uncle.

"Where am I?" he asked the baby as he covered his face with his hands only to pulled them back to announce to his niece a moment later – "Here I am."

After a while, (and four peek-a-boos later), Sirius let Aberforth ask the question one more time, deciding this was definitely the best trip home he had had in a while.

“Where am I?”

“Grimmauld Place –Aberforth, I did not think you were so old yet that you were losing track of where you were.” Teased Sirius.

Sometime over the summer, the easy familiarity between the two had returned. Their common experience of being thrown into parenthood at the deep end had helped the two bond – a bond that Sirius supposed they both now shared with Harry, who had been thrown into a deeper pool than either of them had – as they were fully grown men, whereas he had been a mere boy. Not that he saw his godson like that now of course.

The old man spun around though not so quickly that he might startle the babe in his arms.

“How long have you been there Sirius?”

“Long enough Uncle Aberforth.” He said with a smirk.

Picking up the last of the baby's things in the final bag that had been packed for her (how could someone so small need so much stuff?), he smiled at him.

“Right then little lass, you be good.” Aberforth told his niece before he handed her over to her granddad.

“We'll see you both soon,” said Sirius as he headed to the door with the baby now in his arms, who was gurgling up at him. He had expected her to be asleep by now but he supposed Harry would want a bit of time with her awake before he headed back to the Gryffindor Tower. Casting a mournful glance to the frozen body on the bed, he passed Tusker who was going into change Ariana's drips as he left the room.

If only he could wake her up with a wave of a 'magic wand' (as the muggles said) and make it better, he would. But then if the solution to the problem was that easy then she would have been woken months ago.

Within five minutes he had apparated back into the nearest place you could to the school and was walking up the lawns, across the castle to his apartments.

When he got there he found that Harry had not come alone, not that he had really expected him too. Hermione and Ron were just as loyal, if not more loyal than he had been to the Marauders in their heyday.

"Here she is," said Sirius as he passed the baby to her grateful dad. For a moment he considered telling the trio what he had seen when he walked into Ariana's room, but decided that was not a prank, but rather cruel to do so. Aberforth had been having fun, and it wasn't as if they hadn't played peek-a-boo with her enough. It was just odd to see the headmasters grumpy younger brother doing so.

No, he was much more concerned as to why his godson had been late to the feast and what had happened when they were on the train. He paused to think once the young man had told his tale. He had begun to get accustomed to the fact that Harry could not go a day without getting into some sort of trouble or another.

"Well all I can say to that is trust Cissa to produce such a nasty little brat. At least with Lucius in Azkaban he is not going to be tutor by daddy anymore."

"But Malfoy, a death eater?" asked Hermione. Over the years they had suspected him of being a lot of things, such as the heir of Slytherin, but did Draco really have what it took to be a death eater?

She wasn't convinced.

"We shall have to find out during the term," offered Sirius, knowing perhaps that there and then was not going to be the best place to debate it. Even if Harry had seen him in Knockturn Alley over the summer, they still didn't have enough evidence. Draco was going to

be one for them all to watch throughout the year. However, he could not help but draw parallels between his cousins son and his brother. There could not be a great age gap between the Malfoy heir now and Regulus when he had got involved in the Dark Arts.

“As for Slughorn, it is best to indulge him. Harry, you know better than any one that he was brought back here for a reason. Until we learn what that reason is, I think it best to treat him with respect. He is a bad fellow.” Sirius mused over his old potions tutor.

That night a rain storm cast itself down on Hogwarts Castle. Another school term had indeed begun.

Please review!

PS – I love soft old Aberforth. That scene with him playing peek-a-boo with Alice was completely unplanned until I was writing the chapter and I just thought of it. Hoped you enjoyed it!

Chapter 59

There was an eruption of cheering in the Gryffindor common room. Though life was not perfect, there were at least moments of joy, and this was one of them.

Professors McGonagall and Black (who had always been a favourite with the students of his old house) had also come into be part of the celebrations. After their very first Quidditch game of the season (and their first with one Ronald Weasley playing keeper), they had come out on top. Gryffindor were in the led already. While it was not going to change the fact that Voldemort had returned, Ariana still slept on or that Snape had finally achieved his longed for position as teacher of Defence Against the Dark Arts, it did at least raise Harry's spirits.

He had, of course, been in the stands with his daughter and Sirius watching the game. As much as a wrench it had been when it came to it, he had stayed true to his word and he had resigned from the team. Though he had been asked on numerous occasions to reconsider (what with Alice posing as his godfathers daughter, he could not very well tell them the real reason he had given up his favourite sport) he had always refused. He had to stay focused on what was really important in life – his family.

He had found though that the less he saw of Ariana, the more he was able to make the pain of losing her so suddenly lessen. As unbelievable as it was, when Christmas came and went, she would have had been gone for an entire year ago. A year that they had not spoken to one another once in. A year when he had not been able to kiss or caress her gently in. He hadn't even heard her laugh.

He tried not to think about what he had been doing by night in November of the year before. He had been sneaking out to see her every night. And it was memories like those that meant he wanted to lessen the pain of his loss. It was not to dishonour her, but to get him through the day. His passion for her was as strong as it had always been.

And so even though he longed to hold her and tell her that she was as loved by him as she always had been, spending the day by her

side was no longer the way he preferred to spend his afternoons off. No, he rather be with their daughter.

At three months old, Alice was beginning to grow with alarming speed and Harry found every stage of her development was as exciting as the last. He had never been about baby's that much before he had her. He had not been in contact with one before in the wizarding world and he had sure as hell not held one when he had been living with his aunt and uncle.

So Alice, being both his daughter and a baby had been an entirely new concept. And one he loved the bones off of.

And so inevitably there had been more than one spot open on the Quidditch team that year. Luckily in Gryffindor, there was more than one Weasley.

When she had tried out for the spot, Ginny had easily been the best and so now; with the game over it was much her triumph as it was her brothers. She was a great seeker. Despite their troubles she retreated to the warmth of Deans arms as the celebrated, but all the time she kept her eye on her brother who had little Alice in his arms. They were standing with Sirius, Hermione and Harry. Alice had become honorary Gryffindor she was in the common room that much, being watched by her 'god brother'.

She had to chuckle as Lavender Brown, Ron's new girl friend went over to the select group though.

"Oh Ron, you are such a natural with kids!" she said delighted.

Ron looked panicked, and the others thought with good reason. To everyone's amusement (except perhaps Hermione's) Lavender was not only going out with Ron but ever so slightly obsessed with him. Either because he was what she thought of as her first serious romance, or just because she was slightly nuts, she had become permanently attached to Ron.

There had been a lot of snogging involved and not much else.

Sirius, as much as he found the situation amusing, was also slightly grieved by it. The humour and the light heartedness of the relationship was what he would have chosen for Harry had it been up to him.

Not Ariana and a baby.

Not that he did not love Alice to bits, he did. And his love for her had only increased since they had been at Hogwarts and he had to spend so much time getting used to one another. She was a whole new light life to love, and he did. The moments he had spoken to Harry about – being up with a content baby in the middle of the night. Well, the two of them had had plenty of those moments together. She had helped soothe and mend him. He knew he was still damaged from the twelve years when he had been in Azkaban – something like that could not fail to have an effect on a person.

But since he had rejoined a family group – since he had had his godson and his daughter in his life – things were easier and they were getting better.

There was more than milk and nappies on his mind though. The term had been full of intrigue and what he was most interested in finding out was, like the sixth years, the identity of the half blood prince.

Whoever that book had belonged to – well, they had got Harry some very high marks.

Slughorn had been a success on his return to Hogwarts. The Slug Cub, which had begun on the train, was in full swing, with Harry and Hermione both being members, just as his brother and Lily had been in their day.

It was inevitable that Regulus should be on his mind so much more than he had been since he had first got out of Azkaban. Especially with darker things afoot.

“I am sure it is Draco who planted that locket.” Harry declared to him one snowy afternoon, in the week that followed the Quidditch victory.

Katie Bell was in the hospital wing, cursed. All roads led back to Malfoy.

“Yes, well I must agree, he is a likely suspect. But Harry, until we any real proof there is very little we are going to be able to do about it.”

“So how are we going to get that proof?”

Sirius had no idea. Shaking his head, he considered all he had been told about his young cousin and all they thought they ‘knew’ so far.

Crabbe and Goyle always on the lookout from the Room of Requirement – Snape being more than just a tad over protective of the Malfoy heir. There was something going on. Sirius was just as curious as Harry and determined to get to the bottom of it and he agreed- the most likely story was that whatever was going on it led to back to Draco. But they had to more careful than ever before.

It was ironic perhaps that the hot-headed marauder now cautioned patience to Harry.

“I honestly don’t know.” He sighed. “What about Slughorn? Are you any nearer to getting that memory?”

Harry shook his head. While following Draco Malfoy was a personal crusade he had gone on, Dumbledore had encouraged him to get closer to the new Potions Master. In fact that was the reason he had been brought back, so that Harry could get close to him. Harry was – and it really was the best way to describe his role in it all – bait for Dumbledore. He was everything that Slughorn loved. Famous, talented and affable.

“Not yet but I am going to get there.” He said with a firm resolution. After all he had seen so far about Tom Riddle’s childhood and then his school days – it was imperative that he found out what he had asked Slughorn.

There were so many riddles to solve for Harry that term. But he wasn’t scared. Even though he knew that Voldemort was out there and he was stronger than he had been in years, he was not scared

and he refused to be so. If they knew what he had done to himself all those years ago – if they solved the riddles, then he was not going to be able to get to them.

It was all in the preparation, he told himself.

Before either of them knew it or could justify the time that had passed to themselves, the holiday season was on them again.

It was a terrifying prospect as it meant that Harry could not bury thoughts of Ariana. Christmas had so much significance where they were involved. It had been Christmas when they had got together first – when they went to the Yule Ball together and laughed all night.

It had been just before Christmas when they had had there one sacred night together. Their skin had touched, and their daughter had been created. No blocking out the images of them during the holiday season was not an option.

But there was one option he did have. Whether to go back to her, or to spend Christmas at Hogwarts and go to the Slugclub and be with his friends. He felt disgusted with himself as he realised that the latter option was the one that he wanted to take. There was also the fact he might possibly get the memory he needed there.

He confided this in Hermione.

“Well, the two of you have been apart as long time now. So much has happened to you since she went to sleep,” she said putting what the girl had been through gently. “Maybe you could visit her, but stay here?” she suggested and he nodded. That was the sensible thing to do and he knew it.

“I feel like she is still there some days though. There are times when I think if I just reach out I will touch her once more and she will respond.” Hermione was the one person he could confide in over Ariana as they had been so close. Hermione had known everything that had gone on between them. “I wonder where her head is really, and what she is going through. I know she is going to be torturing herself.” He sighed.

Hermione took his hand.

“What she did – I know it wasn’t her fault, you know it, Sirius does, her brothers do. And we can justify it. She was out of her mind and she was afraid. I suspect had she known, understood – well I know her mother would have lived a lot longer. But knowing you are the reason your own mothers life was cut short... I don’t know if I could handle that either.”

“I handle it.”

“Your mother gave her life willingly. Harry there is a difference.”

“I know there is...I know.” he said gently. “I want to love her so much and I do. But it is getting harder.”

She nodded. She had known it was going to get hard for him one day. Maybe too hard. “Harry, there is a price we pay for love. Distance...time...loss. If any of us are every secure enough to be truly in love, then we risk that we have to pay our debt.”

He nodded as a tear escaped his eye. He didn’t want to betray her. But he felt he was in his mind every time he thought he felt that little bit further from her.

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In the end, he decided that he and Hermione had been right. The best thing not only for him but also for Alice would be for the two of them to remain at Hogwarts over the holiday season where they were going to be able to be with their friends and family and enjoyed the festivities in the best of spirits.

So on the night that would have been somewhat of an anniversary for them both, he left his daughter in the care of Sirius and flew back for the first time in three months to Grimmauld Place. He had owed Aberforth to say that he was coming, but there was no one waiting for him.

A note lay on the table.

I thought you might like some time alone, so have gone down to the library. Be back in an hour.

Aberforth.

Christmas miracles never failed to cease, thought Harry to himself.

Going up to her room, he crept in. Apart from the pyjamas she was in nothing had changed. It was as if he had said goodbye to her the day before.

"It's me," he said as he went into her. "I'm back baby."

Going over to her he kissed her forehead and took her hand gently as he sat on the edge of her bed.

"Merry Christmas darling," he muttered. It seemed pointless but it was something to say to her at least. How she would have laughed at him being all tongue tied.

He shut his eyes and for a moment they were fifteen and making snow men over the holiday season together. That was what they should be doing.

"It doesn't seem so long ago we were together – as one. Does it?" he questioned. The moment he had got into the room – the boy who had made some sense of everything when he had been at Hogwarts was lost in memories and thoughts. "Alice is so big now."

When she was there – when he could smell and touch her, all logic went out of the window and it was as if nothing had ever come between them.

Her delicate bone structure, her pale skin, her long hair... This was her! His Ariana. She had always been his.

"Come on baby, come back to me." He said as he observed her. She made no acknowledgment of his request. "You must free yourself

Ariana.” he said and a new emotion rose in him. Frustration. All the time when she had been awake and she had got herself in to trouble, there had always been someone else therefore her. Always someone to pick up the pieces and put her back together. Now it had been left to her – and she was suffocating under the weight of it all.

“I can’t stand without you anymore. You’re everything to me, you know you are. So you must come back. So we can be together as we were last year again. Do you remember that night? That bed, with roses climbing up it? You were flushed and so beautiful. We have to be like that again. But if you don’t come back– then I will wait for you forever. I’ll still wait forever.” He promised kissing her hand.

“Forever is a long time Potter.” He nearly jumped out of his skin when the rough voice came from behind him. He didn’t know how long he had been in there, but he supposed it must have been a quite a while as Aberforth had returned.

He always lost track of time when he was with her.

Aberforth stalked into the room and stood at the end of the bed. “I should know. You’re not the first man to make that promise to her.” He said and for a moment, Harry was able to imagine a teenage Aberforth tending his sick sister gently, promising her she was going to be alright and they were going to be together one day again.

“My sister is my world Potter,” he said to him. Aberforth was an aging man, and had all the sincerity that went along with that age. But also the bitterness. “I waited for her once and I will do so again. But Harry you’re a young man. Can I give you some advice?” he asked and Harry nodded.

Beckoning him out the room, Aberforth lead the boy to the kitchen. They didn’t know how much she heard and he did not want her to hear this – none the less, it had to be said.

“Get over her while you still can.” Choked out Aberforth. If Ariana knew he had said that to the person she had always considered to be the love of her life, he knew she would not only be hurt but also furious with him.

“What?”

“She is an impossible dream Harry – she always was and always will be. You’ll never have all of her. She’ll only ever be half present in your life.” There was a sadness to Aberforth that had always unnerved Harry in the way it never had with Albus.

“Is this another attempt to break us up?”

“Don’t be so pathetic.” Aberforth spat. He was finding this harder to say than Harry could ever know or understand.

“She is the mother of my daughter – how can I walk away from her?”

“And you seriously think that she will be able to be a mother when she wakes up? Ariana can’t even look after herself!”

“Because you never let her try to!”

It seemed relations between the two were hitting an all time low. It was Christmas. A time when they both wanted to be with her. Loneliness meant that Aberforth had fallen into the depths of despair.

And in that despair he had had to face facts.

“You listen to me Potter, and you listen good. If I was ever over bearing it was because I saw this coming and tried to protect her from it! You couldn’t just leave me, her and Albus be could you? You just had to have her. But she was never meant for you! She should be an old woman by now!” she said with his rage pulsing through him. He took a deep breath to compose himself. He hadn’t wanted to fight Harry – as hard as it was to believe, he had wanted to help him. “The point is this cant end in happily ever after. If she wakes up – and believe me, it is an ‘if’ – she’ll need around the clock care. Let go while you can. Walk away Harry. The body up there is not the girl you loved. It is merely a breathing corpse. Regain control of your life before she takes control of it.”

The one thing that made Christmas bearable that year was the presence of baby Alice. Aberforth's words went round and around Harry's head, his fears set out in front of him.

He wished he had said no when he had offered advice, because no matter how unwanted it was, a tiny part of Harry agreed with what he said.

Please review!

Chapter 60

BATTLE OF HOGWARTS – SECOND WIZARDING WORLD OF OUR TIME BEGINS!

Exclusively, the Daily Prophet can reveal the events that took place yesterday evening at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Last night, a major Death Eater Attack struck the castle. The school was overrun by He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named supporters, leaving doubt of the schools fate and whether it will reopen next year.

Hogwarts Castle is known for being near impenetrable leading to questions being asked about how the Death Eaters got inside. Rumours tell us that both Draco Malfoy, son of the convicted Death Eater Lucius Malfoy, and Severus Snape, Potions Master at Hogwarts School for over a decade, could have aided the Death Eaters in the attack.

Though the casualty rates have not yet been confirmed sources tell us it is possible that some students may have been harmed. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of the School, was forced out and managed to take many students with him as he tried to evacuate the grounds. His actions were both brave and heroic; no doubt saving many lives that otherwise would have been lost. The whereabouts of the Headmaster is currently unknown but it is believed he may have been reunited with his sister and brother....

“Well at least they got one thing right.” Albus muttered to himself as he sat in the newly drawn comfy armchair which had just been place by Aberforth’s chair in their sister’s room. Battered and bruised, he had returned to Grimmauld Place where he had been pulled into the warmest embrace he thought he had ever had off Aberforth, who had been delighted and relieved to see that he was still alive. He was grateful for that.

“We’re together indeed. And that is the main thing.”

But it didn’t feel like it.

“I lost Hogwarts brother mine...”

Aberforth looked at his brother. For the first time ever, before him he saw not the arrogant little git who had wanted nothing more than to be brilliant and to leave him and Ariana as soon as he could, but an old man and one who knew he had made mistakes in his life. And he was miserable about it. His brother knew why of course. He would see himself as a failure.

"You did all you could. None of us are young forever Albus, not even you. You got yourself and others out. No one could have asked for more."

But yes they could have. Albus was sure that he could have done more. He could have chosen a different route for himself to take entirely. He should have gone to Severus and he should have asked him to do what Draco could not if the worst came. That would have been preferable to this.

But in the end he had not been able to do it. Maybe it had had something to do with his 'hero complex' as he knew his brother would call it. Or maybe it had been to do with the fact he had chosen to end Harry's Potters life when he had sent him after the Horcrux's. If he was the last Horcrux himself...

He had been less callous about his own life he noted. He had come to the decision that he had had to go on, so that one day he would be able to explain his choices to his dear sister, and hope that she might find it in her heart to forgive him for sending the father of her baby to his death. He had betrayed her for the last time and when she came back to him, he would once again be a better brother he had said to himself.

Yet as he sat at her side, ice cold and bloodied from the battle still, it made little sense to him. His own choices made very little sense to him indeed.

It was then that he began to sob.

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“Oh come here, thank god!” Harry Potter, still disturbed by the events of the night before was sure that the only way he was going to get any peace that day was, as ever, to hold his baby in his arms. He was right.

Having placed Alice in Molly’s care without much of an explanation as to why the night before, Harry and Sirius had returned to the Burrow. Hermione, Ron and Ginny had also been pulled out of school, Hermione through a desire to be with her friends and Ron and Ginny by their parents after the Death Eater attack. Now, as they stood in the kitchen, they all watched as Molly reunited the rather emotional father and child.

“Dada.” Said Alice as she put her arms lovingly about her father’s neck and Harry clung to her as if there was never going to be another chance too.

“Oh, my sweetheart.”

In the times, that they were living in there was never the guarantee that someone was going to live to the next day.

“Pop!” she said seeing that Sirius was behind him. The girl’s term of endearment for him caused the emotional godfather to throw his arms about his family. The three stood there for quite some time and the Weasley’s left the room, sensing the need that they had for a little privacy, which was practically unheard of at the Burrow.

Even as he held her close though, Harry knew that he had not yet borne his longest separation from Alice and he knew they were going to be separated. He had to go after the Horcruxs. He was going to have no choice but to leave her.

“Sirius – Snape – Death Eater... all along.” They had both tried in vain to put the faith that Dumbledore had in him to the Head of Slytherin House. But for the two passionate Gryffindor’s, now they saw the reason that he was a Slytherin at all was reason not to trust him enough.

“I know he was. We both sound have stuck to our first instincts about him.”

Alice, picking up on their emotion, herself begun to cry. Her daddy was sad and she didn't know why.

Hogwarts, the safest place in the world was now in the hands of the Death Eaters. The first place where Sirius and Harry had truly found a home was now crawling with the people who wanted to hurt them. Their enemies.

And it hurt. It hurt them both.

Destroying Tom Riddle for good was the only way he was ever going to find any peace. That summer Harry knew was going to be the last time he had free with his friends and family for a while.

Before the end of it though, they had more than one engagement to attend. For the time being the Horcruxs were going to wait. They had to prepare themselves for what was to come.

The first thing that Sirius and Harry were taking Alice to that summer was the wedding Remus Lupin to Sirius' kid cousin, Nymphadora Tonks, a committed member of the Order of the Phoenix. Having been friends since there Hogwarts day it was only fit and right hat Sirius should be there for Remus. Once again, just as he had for James Potter all those years before hand, Sirius stood as best man. His godson thought this was a fitting title for his beloved godfather – The best man.

He was to Harry the very best.

A part of Harry could not help but mourn at the wedding though as he stood with his child in his arms. She had got so big. And as ever, all paths of thoughts, all the emotions he felt lead back to Ariana. Would he and her mother have married yet if they had been able to? She had been such an old fashioned girl and he loved her enough to have married her there and then had they been able to.... they had a child together... Harry didn't even have to wonder, of course they would have married.

The thought of spending all the days of his life with her gave Harry a feeling of such indescribable pleasure.

Mrs Ariana Potter. One day, he promised himself, one day.

He watched as they two of them cut the cake together. He saw as they shared their first dance as Mr and Mrs Lupin. He could see the way that Nymphadora was looking at Remus as if there was a whole other more beautiful universe within him. There was such adoration in her eyes. Ari had looked at him like that once.

Once upon a time it seemed. Had it all been a dream? Maybe he was going to wake up in the cupboard under the stairs soon.

"Are you ok?" Sirius asked when they returned to the Burrow that night. He had seen his godson watching the two of them with jealousy and he had no doubt as to what had been going on in his mind.

"It's hard." Harry said not stopping as he lifting his daughter, now changed from her party dress into her baby grow. Both father and daughter wanted nothing more than to go to bed. Lifting the bottle of milk he had picked up on their way through the kitchen, he settled her in to his cradling embrace, wanting to avoid the conversation they were about to have. It was not as if they had not spoken about Alice's mother every month for the past eighteen. But nothing changed. Nothing ever changed, so what was the point? "Come on sweetie," he said as he kissed his child's forehead. Sirius was filled with admiration for his godson. He was such a good dad.

"You know, for what it is worth, I think you two would have been even more in love than Remus and Dora by now..."

"Sirius." Harry cut him sort. "I know you are trying to comfort me but it is really not working," he informed his godfather. He knew he had said it with the best of intentions but it wasn't helping.

That evening, Harry dreamt of Ariana in a wedding dress, holding Alice by the hand. They were walking towards him. Just as he was about to take them both in his arms, they vanished.

-

“Happy birthday to you!

Happy birthday to you!

Happy birthday dear Alice,

Happy birthday to you!”

The sound of singing resounded through the Burrow. The Dumbledore brothers, the newlywed Lupins, the Weasley’s, Sirius and Hermione had gathered in the kitchen. It was official. Alice Lily was an entire year old.

Her eyes stayed focused on the cake on the table that had a little girl swinging back and forth on it, entertaining the girl no end. Her hair was in bunches thanks to her godmother and Ginny, and she had a new red dress on. It was Gryffindor red. In a few months she was going to be a toddler – it was too soon to say goodbye to her all too short baby hood in her father’s opinion.

Harry eyed the younger Dumbledore brother with suspicion. He had hardly been near him since his visit to Grimmauld Place at Christmas time, and though his godfather and his friends had begged him to tell them what had happened between the two of them repeatedly, he had not and he was not going to.

It felt private.

As for Alice, who was just about walking by herself by now, she had no fear of her two uncles who had never been anything but doting and affectionate towards her. Aberforth had not been cut out his niece’s life by Harry, who felt an annoyance him still. How dare he suggest he turn his back on everything he had had with Ari? Where on earth did he even begin to do that? He couldn’t... he just couldn’t.

“I can’t believe she is so big already,” said Ginny to Harry as she brought him over a butterbeer.

"I know, it doesn't seem yesterday that she was born, does it? – Thanks," he said as he took the drink.

Ginny shook her head.

"You're a wonderful father to her you know that, don't you?" she offered him.

"Thank you Ginny," he replied with a sincere smile.

"Well we all see it. And she adores you. Right little daddy's girl."

"Yeah she is. I'm dreading her getting any bigger."

"Well her first boyfriend is in trouble when she brings him home, that is all I am going to say." he said causing Ginny to giggle.

"Well," she said as they watched the little girl pick up her toy doll and drag it about by its leg. "I don't think that is going to be something you have to worry about any time soon."

"No neither do I. I have enough other stuff to worry over."

Ally, perhaps the only person in the room who remained unaware of the danger she and her family were facing, toddled over to her two uncles and insisted that Albus take her into his lap. Settling down, she leaned in against him, showing him her dolly all the while. His hand ran gently through her fine dark locks. She was truly, the most wonderful girl.

But it was not only her he had to see that day. It was also her father.

"Congratulations and many happy returns child." He muttered in her ear. She looked up at him with her twinkling eyes. Oh yes, this was his niece without a doubt.

Passing her over to Aberforth once he had held her for a while, he walked over to Harry.

“Albus how are you?” said Harry. He had been eager to talk to his mentor. After a year of working together in such close proximity, there was an easy relationship between them two of them.

“I am better for seeing that you and my little niece are so well.” He said honestly. Harry gave him a smile.

Albus had never seemed so old though. He had bags under his eyes and he seemed to be more than a little unsteady.

“Harry, I cannot help you much more. You know that already don’t you my dear boy?” he asked.

Harry nodded. He had known what the last year had been about even if he had not said it to himself in such a clear way. Albus had been preparing both of them to hand over the charge of searching for the Horcruxs.

“Yes I do, and thank you. You have done more than enough already.” He said. He had always had a real admiration for him but he did not think it had ever grown so much as it had over the past year.

Albus nodded. “I just have one last thing to pass on to you though. And gifts for Miss Granger and Mr Weasley as well. But I think I would rather like to pass yours on to you first.” He said as he reached into his pocket. “It is the snitch you caught at your very first Quidditch game.”

Harry knew what this was going to be at once. A riddle. He had not given him this for no reason. Yet it did hold sentimental value for him and as he shut his hand about the tiny gold ball for the second time he felt warmth pulsated through him.

“Thank you.”

Harry had not expected his voice to be so thick with emotion, or for his eyes to be burning. He did not think he was going to be seeing the aging headmaster much now. The two embraced warmly. It was a strange sort of goodbye for the two of them. Perhaps not forever, but for now.

"I am going to come back for her, I promise." He whispered in the elder mans ear. "She still could return."

When they eventually drew apart Harry had a determined glint in his eye.

He was going to do this. He had to do this.

Albus shed a tear. In all his life he had never felt so riddled with guilt.

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"Mrs Weasley, can I talk to you?"

"Of course, Harry dear, come and sit down."

Molly Weasley had been as much a mother to him as ever that summer. Ever since he and Sirius had been there she had been checking he was warm enough and he was eating enough. Part of Harry got the feeling that her fuss was a source of great irritation for Sirius, who thought it was his job exclusively to look after Harry. But as for his godson, her behaviour towards him had helped him cement an idea in his head. When he had thought about it, it had been so obvious. But he still was not sure she was going to accept.

It was two nights before the second wedding of the summer, between the first born son of the Weasley's and Harry rival in the Tri Wizard Tournament, Fleur Delacour. He was once again into minds over the wedding. While it was going to be a relief to see two of his friends so happy, it was also going to be hard to look at what he might have had.

"It's just in a few weeks me, Sirius, Hermione and Ron are going to go and look for the Horcruxs." He knew she had been told everything and she understood, but she still looked horror struck. A friend, a child, and two people she looked on as her children were going to going into immense danger where she could not help them. "Mrs Weasley, I can't take Ally with me," he said using his daughter nickname. "With the headmaster and Aberforth so concerned with putting Ari first, I – well, I can't think where she would get better care

than with you. I know it isn't fair of me to ask you, but can you look after Alice? Just till me and Sirius get back? I don't know when that is going to be."

In response to his request, Molly simply threw her arms about him and burst into tears. He assumed that was a yes.

As night fell that evening, Harry climbed up the staircase. He felt better knowing that his little daughter had such a secure home for the remainder of the war. He would trust Molly Weasley with his life, and thus he trusted her with his child.

Going into the room he had been sharing with her since they had got there, he observed the sleeping form of the mini Ariana. Sirius had put her down that night an hour before hand. But he felt he had to be with her.

Kneeling by her crib he put his hand in, and subconsciously the little girl held on to his finger tightly, putting into her lips and drawling all over it. He even loved her drawl. With his other hand, he rubbed soothing circles on her back to ensure she was in the deepest and most peaceful sleep she could be. It hurt his heart to think that the two of them were soon to be so far away from one another. There had barely been a day in her first twelve months when he had not seen her. He couldn't remember the last time he had missed a day with her. It was going to torture him when they were apart, when he didn't know what she had been doing. He did not know what 'firsts' he was going to miss. All he wanted to do was hold her tight and never let go. He had never hated Voldemort so much in his life. He had robbed him of his parents and now he was robbing him of time he could spend with his precious child.

"Alice." he whispered. There were some things he had to say to her. But he didn't want her to interrupt him. In any case, she was so small he knew she was not going to understand. But still, they had to be said.

"I know it is going to make you sad, but in a few weeks dad and pop are going to have to go away for a little while. I don't know how long 'a little while' is going to be. You see, honey, there is a bad man and

he is hurting a lot of people. So daddy has to go and sort him out so he can't ever hurt you and your mummy. While daddy is gone you are going to stay here with Grandma Molly and Grandpa Arthur. But then, one day daddy will come home to you, and so will your pop. And then... well you never know baby...maybe mummy will come with us. I think we're due a miracle, don't you?"

An: If this chapter read awkwardly, I am really sorry. It was a tricky chapter to write in that, I felt I had to get a lot in, but it was all little bits of information. Whereas some chapters are easy to write, some are hard, and I must admit to struggling here which is annoying as I build to the climax. I really want to enjoy writing the remaining chapters so it's bugging me.

Please review anyhow!

Not long to go now!

Chapter 61

Eyes snapped opened.

A heavy breathe was let out.

The body in the bed sat up.

She knew something was desperately wrong; otherwise the two men who had sat by her bed for the past god knows how long would have been with her. Wouldn't they?

She knew where she was of course. Her old room at the Hogshead. She had been at Grimmauld Place for quite some time; she must have been for she had become quite accustom to being there.

It had never been home though. The room where she had been kept had never felt warm or welcoming to her. It had been a make shift hospital room, nothing more. It wasn't like this one. This one was where she had slept by Harry for so long. She remembered something about the Death Eater's finding out about Grimmauld Place. Harry, Ron and Hermione had come there, on the run from the Dearth Eaters when one came with them to just outside the house. Aberforth had been furious that they had to move to another safe house and had refused to go on the run, preferring to go home and let what was going to come, come.

Harry. His name raced desperately across her mind. And perhaps even more importantly than him...

"Alice. My Alice." The hoarse voice felt scratchy as it made its way out her throat. After all it had been... well, she didn't know how long since she had last used it. Where was her daughter? Who had her baby?

Getting out of bed, her legs felt painful to move. She had been in one attitude for far too long and she knew it. That was why every move hurt so much.

But she had to move, she could not stop. Everyone she knew was in danger. The last five minutes had changed everything. They had been speaking in what they thought to be hushed tones but she had heard what her brothers had said. Voldemort was at Hogwarts and they had gone to fight him. By her reckoning Sirius and Harry were could to be there too. Only god knew where Alice was she thought.

She had to get to her boys. They were her main priority.

It was so odd that this should be the thing to bring her about after all this time; she thought absent mildly as she found her dressing gown and put it on. It had not been the birth of her daughter. In her own warped mind she had never been worthy of Alice. Why should she get to raise such a brilliant and beautiful daughter when she had killed her own mother? She had not forgiven herself and she would not. How could she? But neither would she allow those she loved to get themselves killed and her not be there to help.

She didn't know how she could help them. But she could. She was sure and she had to get to those she loved.

Going out of the room into the well trodden passage that would bring her to the living room she tried to image another universe, where Kendra had survived. But it was impossible. The past could not be changed. Not in the way that the future could be.

Arriving in the living room she saw that the portrait of herself above the fireplace had been left wide open. That was how you got to Hogwarts from the pub; she had heard her brother say it! She was going to be reunited with Harry.

But ... there was a battle going on at Hogwarts. She was going to need her wand ... but she had no idea where it was, was without a hope of finding it and every moment that she was not running to Harry was a moment she was wasting. Against her better judgement she tore down the passage. She had to get to him. She knew she was defenceless. But really, what could she do with a wand?

Arriving at what she could only guess to be the Room of Requirement, she saw it was empty. A door way led to what would surely be the

madness that Hogwarts castle was in. She had to get in there and find those she loved so desperately. She was not losing any of them now. Not now.

“God help me.”

Leaving the safety of the Room of Requirement she went out in to the hall to find exactly what she had been expecting to find. Only it was so much worse... even she knew there had been a war going on but she had not thought it was going to be so bad.

There were people running, to and fro, some screaming in agony, others dodging hexes while opponents shot them at each other.

The lights, the bangs, it was just like it had been that night when she had been sent into the future.

Part of her – for a split second the more dominate part – told her to go back to the Room of Requirement and wait for it all to be over. To get to safety. Then when it was all done she might go and find Harry.

But the fact remained that if she did wait for the battle to reach it climax, not only Harry but her big brothers too might be dead. She was not going to let that happen. If she waited, then this time it could really be too late.

With a fresh determination rising in her heart she forced herself to go on. Alice, Harry, Aberforth, Albus, Sirius.

Hermione... Ron... the twins... Ginny...

They were all down there, she would bet anything. She had to get to them and she had to help them.

She just had to try. She would shame herself and her family if she did not. Dodging what hexes she could, she tried to remain on her feet which seemed like enough of a challenge for the time being.

She ran down the stair cases, which even now in the heat of the battle seemed to be changing. They could betray by member of the

side of light to her or his death. All she could do was hope that her luck held out.

She looked about herself desperately. She had to get to the Great Hall as soon as she could. It was imperative. That was where the battle was going to go on, the greater part if it she knew. What a stage it would be for the Dark Lord.

This Voldemort... she didn't know how dangerous he was but she did know that he had put her entire family in danger for the past.... Well, she still didn't know how long she had been ill. She would put a guess at a year or perhaps more.

Long enough to have a daughter...

But her thoughts were stuck on Voldemort. He had been back before she had fallen into her coma. For decades he had haunted the Potters. He had to fall that night, he simply had too for he had been haunting the lives of those she had loved for too long. He was a black cloud. And now that she had woken up perhaps things were going to be different for her and Harry. Even as she walked she allowed herself to dream. She had been stuck in a coma, but to her the night in the Room of Requirement that she had shared with her love did not seem to be twenty four hours ago. How could it be that time could seem to take a minute and a lifetime to pass all at once?

Suddenly her train of thought was disturbed by a pair of arms. "Remus! Have you seen my Remus?" the voice asked with a heartfelt plea - it was longing for this Remus obviously. She had heard that name more than once though she could not remember who it belonged to. Her memory felt fuzzy...

"But...you're Ariana!" The panic had gone out of this woman's voice and astonishment had come into it.

"Yes I am. To the best of my knowledge I have not seen this Remus though I think I know who he is. Harry Potter? Have you seen him?" there was extreme anxiety in her own voice now. She had to find her way to her sweetheart.

The women's face fell and gently she shook her head.

Then she had not seen him.

There seemed to be a fear about the women and a great sadness when she had asked about Harry. She prayed to god once more than nothing had happened to her Harry. She had to get to him.

The two women as quickly and as easily as they came together brook apart going on their separate journeys to find those that they held so dear to their hearts. Under any other circumstance, Tonks would have felt duty bound to protect this girl but as it was, she had to get to her own husband who was now also the father of her tiny son.

Ariana continued on her flight to the Great Hall though it was proving harder and harder to keep her emotions in check, when it was one of those times when it was imperative that she did, for to have another attack now when she had only just come about would spell disaster for her. What did keep her focused were thoughts of a certain Boy Who Lived.

As she run, she remembered all the time they had spent as one when they had been in school together. When they had enjoyed spending lazy afternoons in one another's arms and when they had built snowmen when it Christmas. She remembered every touch and every kiss that had led her to fall illogically and irrevocably in love with him.

All the time when she had been thinking these thoughts she had been running as fast as her aching legs would carry her. And then she had got to her destination.

She was outside of the Great Hall, and as she poked her head about the door she could see the madness that was going on inside of it.

Indeed it was not like the night when she had been sent into the future. It was ten times worse. She did not understand how there could be so much hatred in the world. What lead another human to want to end another's life? Honestly, it made no sense to the gentle teenager, who knew she was a killer herself.

How old was she even now?

Her wild thoughts for a time were interweaving and fragmented, as they had been so many times before. But then everything changed. On just the sight of him everything changed. He was there.

Had she not seen him she would have noticed that dead bodies were laying about her and the relatives, despite the fact there were people who were still duelling people around them, had fallen to their knees and were weeping over the still warm corpses of their loved ones.

Harry seemed to be locked in a confrontation with someone that could only be the Voldemort who she had heard so much about but not yet had the pleasure to be introduced to yet, she thought sarcastically. But she didn't even really see him because there was her hero of a lover. He was all that mattered to her in that heart beat. He was so close to her.

Out of the corner of her eye though she saw something rather unnerving. A man, who was so unsavoury looking that she guessed he could only be a Death Eater. He was raising his wand and he was going to curse Harry. She just knew it in her heart.

She focused on her love, wanting to scream out for him to turn but for some strange reason she knew she could not. It was as if her voice was not working. It just wouldn't let her scream.

It was then that she did something she had never before done. It was a contradiction in itself.

Controlled uncontrollable magic.

-

Even as he stood there confronting Voldemort Harry knew that something had happened. There was something about him. The only thing he could think to liken it to was the protection his mother had given him when she had died to save his life. But whereas Lily's

protections had defended him internally, it was if this protection that he had felt come over him fortified him externally.

Instinctively, he knew that something hit this protection and - it just bounced off. It was as if nothing could get through to him, but he knew innately he could send magic out of it.

He was protected and Voldemort could not get to him as long as it stayed. The invisible bubble saved his life.

Then it was time. He had to finish this. There had been enough pain, not only for him, but Sirius who had lost a best friend to the first war; Albus who had worked so tirelessly to put as stop to Tom Riddle his entire life; Aberforth, who had to go in to hiding; the Weasley's, who had cared so lovingly for Alice; Remus, who had just married...

His parents.

That was enough motivation to get him thought this. But then another pair of faces flashed into his mind.

His daughter. His sweetheart.

It was for them that he was really doing this. For his girls.

He continued the conversation he was having before he felt the protection encase him. The end was near. He could smell it, touch it, taste it...

"So it all come down to this doesn't it? Does the wand in your hand know its last master was Disarmed. Because if it does... I am the true master of the Elder Wand."

A red light burst into the room as if it was a sun from the very heavens. They might as well have come from above.

Simultaneously the two wizards made their moves.

"Avada Kedavra!"

“Expelliarmus!”

A bang went off, as if a canon had been fired within Hogwarts. In all happened in a split second. Before he knew it, the realisation that Voldemort was dead hit him. The man who had caused him so much grief and heartache was gone. The monster that had killed Lily and James was dead.

He was gone and could no longer hurt him. Voldemort was not coming back this time.

About him, a cheering erupted, all his friends, from the beloved companions who had helped him on his way here – they were celebrating what they had all had a part in bringing about. The fact that Voldemort was dead. He was gone forever.

Harry turned. He wanted to know what had happened. Who had given him that protection?

But he could not see anyone. All he saw was a bubble like object that encased a human. It was like the bubbles he had seen Dudley blow as a child (he had never been allowed too). But it was brilliant, and full of colour, the most vivid purples, the purest blues and the most vivacious red. Inside of it he could see something moving. Someone moving. And then, just like bubbles he had seen as a child it pop.

After all the bangs, the crashes – the bubble broke with a simple pop. It was a gentle sound.

The someone who had been encased in it was revealed to him. It was a girl. She looked as if something miraculous had happened to her. As if something had changed within her. As if a life time of suffering had come to its end.

But it didn't matter to him what had just happened – not just then. All that mattered was who the 'her' was.

His knees felt weak. He had just killed Voldemort and he had had enough courage to do that. But the sight of the girl on the floor made him weak to his very soul.

At last, the miracle he had been praying for had all along.

Their eyes met - her eyes were open! Deep and blue like her daughters, and she feasted on his own. She had never seen them look just that green before. Not quite that green... But as her eyes burned hot with tears it was harder to see him.

Blinking furiously, she tried to regain her focus. She could not lose sight of him. She didn't want to at least, not for a moment.

Bending down just in front of her so that they were at the same height, he knew both of them were well aware that they were being watched by the whole Great Hall. All eyes were on them. But neither of them cared. Everyone else could go to hell for in that moment - all that mattered was the two of them and the fact they were back together.

He reached out and took a bunch of her bow lank, greasy locks in his hand gently. She was not as she had been.

She was even better.

For all her imperfections.

"I have been waiting for you longer than you know..." he whispered as he sat on the floor unable to support himself.

Voldemort was gone and Ariana was back all in the same day. It had happened in the space of five minutes. It was as if she was back because he was gone. Now that he had done what he had too – now he had fulfilled the prophecy he could be with her again.

She was his reward.

"Harry ... Harry..." it was as if his name was the only word she knew.

It was like they had never seen one another before – not properly. Both of them reached out to cup the others face, happy relieved tears trickling joyfully down their faces.

"It's you. Baby..." he whispered as he pulled her closer and their foreheads kissed. Their noses were touching and gently she brushed his with her own.

"Harry..." she gave way to her own sobbing and he pulled her close. Ariana nuzzled into him, kissing his neck as she did so. She had never been so alive. She had never known who she was more. She had never been so sane in her entire life.

"Alice..." she whispered into him. "I want our Alice."

From across the hall two loving brothers and an emotional godfather watched the reunion, none of them having the heart to interrupt the moment that rightfully could only ever belong to two people.

But even as they watched it, Albus realised what had just happened to his sister. His heart sunk.

A/n: Ok, I know Voldemort told the Death Eaters they were not to fire on Harry in the original, but I just had to get one of them so that Ariana's actions in the final battle counted for something. I hope you thought this way of bringing her round worked as an idea. I must admit that over all, I quite like this chapter as it turned out the way I had always planned it too.

As ever, please review!

Author note: Tissues may be needed – and possibly a pitchfork in case you hate me afterwards. This has been up loaded with the last chapter and epilogue. If this is the end, the least I can spare you is a cliffy.

Chapter 62

“I feel as if this is the first time I ever saw you, do you remember?”

“Out in the forest I was terrified of you all.” she responded.

The last place she had wanted to go was back to bed but Harry insisted that she had too. He was taking her home with a full bill of health and then they were going to be a family all of their own. Tusker had been and gone. They were just wanting on the results. It wouldn't be long they had been assured. Then they were going to be together.

Just the two of them with Alice.

He hadn't left her since he had seen her awake. Joy radiated through him, he felt as if he had drunk a thousand barrels of butterbeer. He felt that good, and was ridiculously happy.

Unless he let other thoughts creep into his head.

Fred. Tonks. Lupin.

People he had known. People he had loved and respected. Teddy was an orphan. Sirius's new godson was now in the same situation he had been when he had been a baby. War was a terrible thing.

He felt as she reached out to touch his face and he gave her a small smile.

“You're back with me. You're back.” He had to keep saying it or else it was not true.

Leaning forward, their lips met. Hers felt dry and cracked... but he still wanted her so much. He could not put it in to words how much he wanted her.

A knock on the door interrupted them.

It was Ron.

“Harry, I think the rest of us might want to see Ari, and besides – Mum just got here with Alice!”

Ariana looked nervously from Ron to Harry. She had wanted to see her daughter so much when she had first woken up and she still did. Alice was her daughter; their child. Her arms were aching to hold her and she knew the pain a mother went through now when she was not with her children. She had felt it every day since she had had the caesarean. But she was also scared. Alice ...

“She isn’t going to know me, is she?” she asked Harry.

“She has seen you more than once – if I know Alice at all then she is going to surprise us both.” He said as he leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

“You have no idea how brilliant you are do you?” he asked.

“Focus on Alice, Harry,” she said giggling. “Focus.” She did love it when he piled affection on her. Drawing back the covers he helped her out the bed and put a protective arm about her. He wasn’t letting go.

Slowly, they walked out of her room and down the hall. They could both hear her babbling away. Their daughter... As they walked into the living room, Ariana for the first time properly saw her baby and her breath was stolen from her – for Alice was so much more beautiful than she had thought. She was the most beautiful thing in the world. She had her father’s thick dark hair and her very own big blues eyes. But they looked so much better on her daughter, she thought to herself. She had known she had come to see her when she had sick but she had never really seen her before. But she was wonderful.

“Alice.” She whispered. The entire room was once again watching her. But there were a much smaller amount of people there than there had been in the Great Hall.

Hermione and Ron, who she had been told were the godparents of her child were there, as were her brother’s who she was yet to be properly reunited with. On the sofa, holding Alice was Sirius. Molly stood by the door with Arthur tears dripping down their faces. Fred was dead.... their son had died. Unable to see one mother reunited with her child when she was not going to be, Molly turned from the room. The joy she felt for Harry was minuet compared to the overwhelming grief she felt for her baby. And she had to get to George. He was going to need her.

Ron however stayed. With Hermione in his arms he was as much part of the extended Dumbledore-Potter family than anyone else was. He was weighed down by grief, but he wanted to stay none the less.

“Alice, look who it is. Daddy and mummy.” Said Sirius to his grandchild as she sat on his lap.

It was obvious she was unnerved for she had hardly seen her father since August. Sirius she had seen a hand full of times. It was only Albus and Aberforth she had seen regularly.

As she approached them, Ariana fell to her knees in front of the child. She wanted desperately to do nothing more than reach out for the child and hold her forever. The girl in Sirius arms was her baby. She had come from her and they were a part of each other, the biggest part.

“Alice Lily...” she whispered with joy. Her daughter was there. They were together for the first time.

“Mummy ‘wake?” she asked.

“Yes sweetheart. Mummy’s awake.”

But when Ari reached for her daughter she recoiled into her grandfather. Sirius looked at Ariana with pity but she shook her head.

"It ok."

She had been expecting that reaction.

"Daddy!" it was quite obvious that she had missed Harry and she was more than eager to be reunited with him than she was her mother. Harry looked at his love with pity, just as Sirius had.

"Really... it's ok."

But she did feel the bitter sting of her child's rejection. As soon as she was in her father's arms though in comparison, she nuzzled into his neck and let him kiss her.

But then they had had so much more time together before the war, Ariana reminded herself. Harry had really brought her up since when she was born to last summer so what they were having was a true reunion. Whereas Alice had never been with her mother before she had been left at the Weasley's. Harry and Alice knew one another; undoubtedly, they had also missed each other. But her daughter had never known her. There wasn't the same connection.

She needed five minutes she realised.

Turning to the stairs that lead to the bar, she slowly walked down them giving Harry a reassuring smile as she did, but tears welled in her eyes.

"I'll go." Hermione said gently as she went to follow her friends out but Albus and Aberforth shook their heads.

"Let us."

They found there sister sitting in one of the booths with tears cascading down her face. She had not realised till then just how much she had missed out on. Her daughter was no longer a baby. She was a real little girl already and she was so beautiful. She had been right she was never going to worthy of Alice. In the same way she was unworthy of her big brothers.

"I don't know how you can bare the sight of me," she said as they approached. They knew why she had said it of course, for they knew her.

"What happened – Ariana it wasn't your fault. You couldn't stop it." Albus said as he and Aberforth slid on opposite ends of the booth as to trap her between them. She had to talk to them or they were never going to reassure her.

But she looked at him with confusion in her eyes.

"I killed the women who gave you both your lives. I killed our mother. Why don't you hate me?" she asked. If they hated her it would be so much easier. It was there kindness that she found do hard to take, truly. But when she looked at how they had been with her ever since she had turned up, they had been so gentle and so loving.

The best brothers in the world.

"Ari, don't you say that. Ever. Sweetheart, we could never hate you." Aberforth said his own gruff voice thick with the emotion that they all felt.

"I didn't mean to do it."

"I know you didn't."

"I love her so much."

"I know you do."

She hadn't realised it but she had reached out for their hands and now held one each as she tried to come to terms with everything.

There were other things in her head too...

"Aren't you angry?"

"Ariana, we told you, love, that doesn't matter-"

“No, not about mother – Harry, Alice. Aba, I lied to you knowingly.”

He sighed heavily. He did not know yet how to respond to that one. She had lied to him. He had been furious.

“I am not going to say that I was not disappointed in you when I first found out what you had done kid because I was. You were my baby sister – and you lied, and gave your virginity to a boy I thoroughly disapproved of – I think you knew that much.” She nodded. She had always known he had not been a fan of Harry’s, “but that was what – two and a half years ago now...”

He saw the shock cross her face. It was obvious she had not known she had been ill for so long, but he nodded sadly to confirm her fears.

“It’s been that long Ari. Somewhere along the way though I learnt what was important in life and it is not hatred and anger Ariana. You have the most beautiful child. And as much as I hate to admit it, I think Harry loves you more than I could ever have guessed. He stood by you in the most courageous way – even when I tried to dissuade him from it. So I figure I can go down two routes now. I can shout at you and tell you that you did wrong and were stupid. Or I can take you in my arms; tell you I love you and that I missed you. I am done being angry with the world Ariana.”

Burying her face in his chest, she wished more than anything she had been honest with him from the start and she had not lied to him. She wished she had been a better sister. She wished to god she had not been in the garden that day.

“You’re both the best brothers a girl ever had, you know that?” she asked.

Turning her face she looked at Albus. He had been crying for quite some time. Here they were and as ever the story ended with them – the three Dumbledore siblings together. Turning she pulled him close and held on to both of them simultaneously. She was never going to let either of them down again.

But Albus felt a wrenched guilt in his heart. It didn't matter that Harry had survived. He had still sent him to his death.

"You two - we have an audience." Aberforth whispered.

At the door Harry stood with Alice. The little girl in his arms looked at Ariana shyly.

"Someone wants to say hello to her mummy now." He informed her. Ariana smiled.

"Come here then," she said and Harry brought their child over to her. She was so gorgeous. It was the only thing her mother could think of as the girl actually reached out for her.

Placed between her uncle's on her mother's lap Alice looked up at her as if trying to figure out why they had not been together before... Mother and daughter... together at last.

Yet, even as she held on to her own baby Ariana knew she was never going to be able to forgive herself for what she had done to her own mother even if Aberforth and Albus were good enough to find a way in their own hearts to forgive her. She just couldn't do it.

"I love my baby girl." She whispered in Alice's ear. "Did you know that? Mummy loves you so much..." she told her as they looked one another in the eye. They were going to be together now.

Enveloping her daughter in her arms, she kissed the top of her head and only prayed that Alice understood what she felt for her. Holding her was the best feeling in the world. Ariana wasn't content, she was joyfully... oh no it was so much more. She felt as if she had been waiting for this moment her entire life.

It was then that Tusker came into the room. She had been crying. She looked as if she was in disbelief and Albus knew that his suspicions had been confirmed.

"Miss Dumbledore... I need to talk to you."

One week later

Harry was still trying to digest the news. Despite the fact that everything had seemed as if it was on the up, once again appearances had deceived him.

"Alice let me put her down for her nap. Come see, Harry she's so adorable." A triumphant voice said to him from the door. He turned to see Ariana.

He didn't know how she was doing it. Why was she so calm? The question had been written on his face and she knew he needed answers.

Knowing that they were not going to go down to their daughter at that moment, she went over to the kitchen table. The small cottage that they were in sat off the Hogsmeade. Their first home together. It also was destined to be there last.

Taking his hands into her own, she took a deep breath. "I know you are finding this hard to come to terms with."

"Aren't you?" he asked almost angry with her. Why wasn't she as dazed as he was?

She shook her head.

"Why not?"

"Maybe I always knew something like this was coming. Or maybe it's because it is no less than I deserve." She truly felt at peace with what was happening. Death didn't scare her.

"Don't say that." He begged her.

"Why not? It's the truth. Harry, I don't think you understand. I killed my own mother. Whether it was intentionally or not, it was the most appalling crime. I cut someone's life short. My own mother... the best woman I ever met. So now mine is being cut short... This is no less than my just desserts and nothing you, Sirius or my brothers could

say can convince me otherwise.” She said to him firmly. Tusker had told her the week before that she had lost her magic. Trying to protect Harry when she had only just woken up had broken her powers. When she had been swept up in her own magical bubble in the Great Hall... well, that had been her last moment as a witch. Now she was neither muggle, nor squib. And she was soon to begin to deteriorate... there no cure... nothing any one could do.

Six months tops...

“So what about me and Alice; do we deserve this?”

“No, not at all.” She said to him. It was them that she was sad for. Those who were going to be left behind.

Strange, she had been involved in so many things over the years that could have lead to her death, and now that this Dark Lord was gone, she was really and truly dying. It was as if she had survived a sinking ship and was drowning in the bath tub.

“You know if I could turn back time I would? Change my actions. Leave you alone.” She said to him and he looked at her in confusion and hurt. “Don’t get me wrong my love. You were the first person who ever made me feel whole. I don’t regret a moment that we have spent together. You have made me feel so alive. And I adore our baby girl. The memories of our time together” she felt hot tears prick her. She didn’t want to reflect on the past – on what she might have had. “I love you Harry James. You really are the great love of my life. But I caused you more pain and trouble than anything else. If I could spare you that by giving you up sooner, I would have. You’d have been better off without me.”

“Never!” he said firmly. The one thing he would never be without her was better off. She was his whole reason for being, along with their child.

“Silent thoughts of times together, bring memories that will last forever.” She quoted to him. She shook her head. “Maybe I should go back to the pub.” She suggested.

“I won’t let you go.”

“Harry, whatever happens now I am not going to see next summer... If I stay you will only lose me again.”

There was so much truth in her words that they hurt him. It was as if she was cutting him with a knife. He wanted to deny what she was saying. But he could not.

“But if you go back to the pub now then I also lose you.” He countered her argument. “No matter what I do going to lose you.”

She shrugged. She didn’t know what to do for the best.

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Then don’t go...” he said as he held on to her hands and looked into her eyes. “Ari, if you are right and you do only have a few months left – then let’s make every moment count. Let’s spend them together... in the best way.” He asked and she nodded. He was right. They should make every moment count.

Pressing his lips to hers, he sighed. If this was it, if their relationship was on a timer... “If you’re going to leave me, you go on my terms.”

“And what are those terms?” she whispered as their foreheads kissed.

“You leave me as Ariana Potter.” He asked.

She looked at him torn between joy and intense grief. She had never felt so many emotions.

“If we marry, you’ll be a widower by the time that you are twenty. Harry are you seriously telling me that is what you want...” she shook her head as the words came out in no more than a whisper.

He nodded determinedly. He had made up his mind long ago that he was going to have her as his wife. “More than anything. Let me lose you on my terms... please Ariana. Be my wife?”

“It will be the greatest honour of my entire life.” She said. Getting out of her own chair, she walked over to his. Pushing it out from under the table, he made room for her to sit on his lap. When she did, he wrapped passionate arms about her.

He might lose her, but not yet.

“We still have some time.” He reminded her.

She nodded and shut her eyes. She didn’t want to know anything else than the fact she was going to be his wife in that moment. It was all that mattered.

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The next day Ariana went back to the Hogsheads. It felt strange walking in there as a visitor. She had got so use to calling the run down back street pub home. It was the most comfortable, warm place in the world to her mind – except perhaps her little cottage. Like an old pair of slippers... or a cup of coco....

“What can I get you young Missy?”

“A butterbur and cuddle please barman.” She said as she walked over to Aberforth. She also noted Albus the bar. It was only five minutes till opening time.

Once she had greeted her brothers she took up the stool back to Al. She had come with the intent of telling them of her and Harry’s plans but now she felt rather nervous.

Whether it was because they were used to losing her and getting her back, or just because they had had a longer time on the earth, lost more people, they were dealing with her fate better than Harry was. Either that or they were good at hiding their true feelings.

“What’s eating you Ariana?” Aberforth asked. He knew when something was up with her – a general hint was she was awake, but

it was something different this time he could tell. Like there was news she had to tell them and she did not quite know how too.

“Harry asked me to marry him last night.” She said quickly. If she did not say it fast then she was quite sure that she would never have got it out at all.

“Did he now?”

While neither was shocked, neither had seen it coming. Apparently Harry had asked neither of their permission for her hand.

“I said yes.”

“Well then, congratulations my dear.” Said Albus as he embraced and kissed her. He was rather feeble now. There was no denying the fact that his age was beginning to catch up with him after all he had been through. She held on to him to him gently.

But she really wanted Aberforth’s approval. Somehow it would just mean more to her.

He looked at her and there were such conflicting emotions in him. She could see it in his eyes. He was happy for her. But he was hurting.

“He’s a good man. I know he is going to take care of you.” He nodded. He could not deny it any more. His eyes filled with unshed tears and she knew he was not going to let them out. They had all done enough crying over the last years.

But she had one last request to make of him.

“Aba, I want you to stand in papa’s place. I want you to give me away.”

He nodded. “Of course.” He said gruffly as if it was nothing. But the truth was it meant a lot to him – because after all the three of them had been together, even though he knew her and Albus loved one another dearly, it meant (at least to him) that he remained his sister’s

adored favourite. He had not and would not leave the special place in her heart where he had always sat.

Reaching over the bar he held her hand. The bonds that tied the two of them together had not broken – in fact they were stronger than they ever had been before.

Please review!

'My dearest Friend, whether I stand high or low in the estimation of the world my conscience is clear. I thank God I have you for a partner in all the joys and sorrows, all the prosperity and adversity of my life. To take a part with me in the struggle.' John to Abigail Adams

Chapter 63

The wedding was going to be quiet affair. Neither Ariana nor Harry wanted a lot of people there. They didn't even want a lot of people to know about it. They could only image the story lines that would hit the prophet.

Fairytale ending for Boy Who Lived!

Happiness for Harry at last!

Dumbledore sister marries way after her time.

It was not a pleasant thought. Besides the quieter it was the easier they found it was going to be to arrange. And so that week was all preparation for what promised to be the wedding of the year (for those in attendants) begun.

Albus found a discreet vicar. Aberforth sorted the booze, Sirius did the food. There was no time to waste. The Weasley's, Hermione and Andromeda Tonks all got invites. Selected Order members would also be attended and they were all informed if the circumstances in which bride and groom were cementing there love and why it had to be so quickly.

Part of Ariana said it was vulgar to push on with their big happy day when it was so recently that so many people had died. But it was better done sooner than later.

Those who knew of these circumstances of course understood. The discipline they had to employ was in effect 'now or never'. There was no point in waiting. It made no sense too.

The big day was set for that Sunday. Like everything else that had significance in their 'love story' it was to take place on Hogwarts

grounds. It was where they had met; where they dance at the Yule ball; conceived Alice.

Thus on Saturday evening, much to Harry's annoyance he was forced out his own home as Luna, Ginny and Hermione came over. Ginny's new sister in law Fleur also came, as did Poppy Pomfrey and McGonagall. Though the young women saw this as the elders keeping an eye of them, Ariana was glad they were there. They had all helped her in their own way.

But none of them seemed to be in the party mood. Maybe as they knew what was coming. Going out into the kitchen, Ariana grabbed another bottle of wine. There was no reason in the world why she should not indulge herself a little, not now.

A knock on the door told her she was not alone. Hermione was there, as was Ginny.

"Ready?" she asked.

"For tomorrow? As I am ever going to be." She shrugged. A sigh followed. "I want to be with him forever Hermione. Six months isn't long enough." Since she had been planning her wedding, she had been faced with the enormity of what she was going to lose when she lost her life. It wasn't just what she had. No what hurt her heart the most was knowing she was also losing what she might have one day had. A long life...matching rocking chairs... grandchildren...

"I know. But at least the two of you get to say your goodbyes this time."

Ariana nodded. In truth, it was only when she thought of her young family she had any quibbles with her fate. Otherwise she was more than able to accept it.

"We are too young to have to think of goodbye."

For herself, she welcomed what would come. For him, she did not. For Alice, she didn't. A life time in her fiancées arms was she could

not deny though, an appealing prospect – if only it could be her fate. She wanted to see her little daughter grow tall.

Selfishly, when she thought of her death she thought of what was going to come after. A chance to be with her parents, the chance to say sorry. A life time with Kendra and Percival also had its appeals. And it felt so long since they had been together.

She didn't want to leave what she knew. But she looked forward to what was ahead.

"I know you are. But at least you can," said Hermione as she took the wine and moved towards the living room. "Are you not coming?"

"I need to talk to Ginny quickly, can you give us a moment please?" she said as she beckoned the red head further into the room.

Hermione who hadn't ever known the pair to be close looked at them curiously before she left them.

Ginny shifted uncomfortably. She had never disliked Ariana but she had never been her favourite person in the world. She had ever unnerved her. Now that she was left alone with her, she knew she would rather be anywhere else in the world.

"I know you are probably wondering why I wished to talk to you – it is a strange reason I give you that but I feel I have to say it," Ariana said taking a deep breath to compose herself. She didn't wish to say what she was about to but she knew she had too all the same. "In a few months I am not going to be here anymore, Ginny. Harry is going to be alone and I cannot stand that thought as he is such a good person – he deserves more than me; always did no matter what Aberforth said to the contra." she said thoughtfully looking her straight in the eye. "Don't let him be alone for long. I have seen what grief can do. It can fester away at you. Destroy your chances of happiness. Don't let that happen to my man."

Ginny nodded and was about the reply when the other girl swept out of the room and back to the party. She stood there for a while thinking

on what she said, not understanding what she meant or why she said it.

-

"Well how do I look?" asked Ariana as she stepped into the sunlight. Having come out the cottage she found her daughter with her uncle's. The four of them would go up to the ceremony together, along with Hermione.

"You look lovely my dear." Albus reassured her.

Aberforth shook his head. "A rose among the thorns, kiddo." He nodded.

As ever, Ariana had gone for her own style when it came to her wedding dress rather than what was 'in style'.

Rather than fit her tightly, it hung off her body as if her skin did not touch the cloth. The only thing the smallest bit risqué about it was that the next line was lower than she was used to, but neither was she exposed. On the contrary she was well covered up.

"Oh and what a pretty little Alice we have here!" she said looking at her little daughter in her flowers girls dress. It was baby blue and matched the colour of her eyes.

"Mama!" she squealed and run to her. Lifting Alice in her arms, she passed her bouquet to Hermione who was her maid of honour.

Hermione felt her heart rise in her chest at the sight of mother and daughter together. They were getting so close only to be pulled apart from one another someday soon.

"Aren't you just the most beautiful girl in the world hey sweetheart?"

"Are we goi' to go and see daddy now?" she asked.

"Yes we are. And then mummy and daddy are going to get married." She told her with a smile.

“Like a ‘airy tale?”

“Yes sweetheart. Only better.” She muttered as she kissed her child’s nose making Alice laugh.

The walk up to the school was slow, Ariana walking between her siblings. They were all aware of the fact that by the end of the day she would indeed be Harry Potter’s wife before she as their sister.

Going over to Hogwarts felt strange and wonderful all at once. The last time she had been there had been a battle going on – and now she was getting married there. As she saw the castle, it melted her heart. She never realised how beautiful it was. But then she was seeing everything with brand new eyes.

The marriage would take place under a willow tree by the lake, and as they approached they saw chairs were set out. The groom and his party had arrived. Harry stood at the front, Sirius and Ron at his side.

“I’ll go sit down,” Albus said as he kissed his sisters cheek. “Really my dear, you are lovely.” He told her before leaving her to Aberforth.

Her big brother held on to her with one hand and her child in the other, while Ariana had been passed her bouquet of roses back.

The two siblings locked eyes. This was it. “What am I going to do without you?” asked Aberforth.

“Live brother mine. Live.” She said to him. Leaning forward, she gently kissed his freshly shaven face and then pulled back. Her veil was then put over her face by Hermione. And just like that, she was gone from him.

Turning to the aisle Ariana didn’t feel in the least bit nervous, there was nothing to be nervous about. Her eyes settled on Harry and she was safe in the knowledge they were soon to be man and wife.

Her hand rested on her brothers arms. She could feel that he was shaking. This was not what he wanted for her and never had been. But because she had asked it of him, he did it.

Guilt and an overwhelming sense of gratitude hit her.

“I love you.” She whispered as they walked down the aisle.

“I know Ari, I love you too kid. You can come home – whenever you need me. I’m still here.” He promised as they walked through the chairs.

They were all too suddenly with Harry.

Taking his sisters hand he put it in Harry’s and once they were joined laid his own over it.

“I give you my sister – and my blessing on this marriage.”

And it was then that in Ariana’s mind that they were married. The words they said after – the vows were meaningless. It had been Aberforth who had joined them in love – but the vicar who joined them legally.

As they stood by side by side, bride and groom both wore electric smiles. This was all either of them had wanted for so long. And if they were not going to be together long then they were going to make the most of them time that they did have together.

The actual ceremony passed in a bit of a blur for Ariana. All she knew was that when it came to an end she turned to see many tears stained faces (Sirius’ included). Harry wasn’t crying though. And neither was she. Maybe they both had enough elixir now to realise that they could put the time together first, the grief second.

“You may kiss the bride...” the vicar said.

Between them, their child looked up as her mother and father kissed in the sunlight in moment that would warm Harry’s heart for the rest of his life.

Her lips weren't cracked as they had been when they were reunited. Her hair had been washed clean of the grease. It was as if she had been utterly healed in preparation for that day.

"I will always be yours," she whispered to him as they draw apart. People were clapping but he only saw her and their daughter. They were the only ones who mattered.

Sweeping down, he picked Alice up, put an arm about his wife's waist and walked them down the aisle.

Not since Halloween night 1981 had there been a real Potter family and yet here they were. The new age of Potters.

Harry, Ariana and Alice: The Potters.

They were a real unit now.

He continued to smile, kissing both his wife and child as they walked. All that mattered was that they had one another, and they were together.

After that they had a wedding supper in the Gryffindor Tower which had been decorated for the event. The initial thought had been to use the Great Hall but it would have been too much for all of them to go where their friends had died so recently. It would be disrespectful.

The castle was full of ghosts, and not just the floating kind.

It was not long till music was playing and drink was flowing through the Tower. Harry and Ariana insisted. What had happened that day was not to be looked on as the last desperate wish of a couple who were doomed to soon be separated forever but rather a couple just like any other who wanted to show the world how devoted they were to one another. Not that anyone could doubt it after all they had been through together. Had she not been dying they still would have married – perhaps they may have waited a little longer, but ultimately they would have married.

After the food, the tables were cleared away and the dancing begun, with Ariana and Harry opening it of course.

“I feel like we are back at the Yule Ball.” She whispered to him.

He shook his head at how long that seemed ago now. They had been through so much and changed so much from those days. They had been so young at the Yule Ball. Gladly would he compete in a Tri Wizard Tournament now. That seemed like a doddle compare to everything else he had done.

The moment for them was happily interrupted by their daughter who informed her father she wanted ‘up.’ So it was with Alice wedged between them that they finished up the song – and neither of them would have wanted it to end any other way.

She had been about to sit down at the end of the dance when she heard a voice in her ear.

“Have you a dance for your exceedingly old brother?”

“No,” she turned. “But for Al; yeah, I might have one for him.”

Albus gave a light heated laugh and led her back to where she had been standing with Harry and took her in his arms. His eyes twinkled.

“How could I have ever been ashamed of you?” he had meant to say it in his head but he had said it out loud.

She didn’t look horrified though – rather she looked grateful for the honesty he was affording her.

“I didn’t mean to shame you if I ever did.”

“As if you could Ariana.” He said. “I was a stupid young man. Know only if I could turn the clock back, I would. I have been very selfish over the years – yes I have, don’t interrupt,” he said cutting off her protests. “I made more than one decisions when I put something over you and Aberforth in importance and I never should have. I even put something in greater importance than little Alice. You both should

have been number one to me from the moment that we lost our parents. I adore you little sister and am so proud of what you have achieved. Ariana if I could go back I would. Please forgive me.”

“There is nothing to forgive. And I would not have you go back! Things have not been easy on any of us, brother mine and you know that better than anyone else in the entire world. Albus, if you want the truth then I would not change a hair on your head – even back when we weren’t that close. Your folly, as you might call it; your misjudgements meant I was sent into the future. It meant that we could be so much closer than we ever could have been back then and it led me to, Harry. You let me be educated and you gave me a better life. You allowed me to grow up and I will always be thankful for that. But you have got to let go of this grief, guilt and me.”

“Ariana – even when you go, I suspect we won’t be apart for that entire long.”

A lump rose in her throat. “Maybe not – but you follow me when your called and not before – do you understand?”

He nodded.

“Brother I mean it – thank you – for every little thing you ever did. Albus, you’ll never know how much I love you.”

He nodded, and they feel silent. The two of them danced on long after the music stopped.

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“What a day Mrs Potter.” Said Harry.

It was hardly the traditional end to a wedding night, with them both in comfortable nightwear and dressing gowns, but then they had always had their own ways of doing things. Harry brought in two mugs of hot chocolate to the living room where he found his daughter sleeping in her mother’s arms, curled up in front of a roaring fire. He had never seen such a pleasant sight.

"Indeed, Mr Potter," she said as moved gently enough so Harry could sit behind her but not so quickly as to wake their child.

Harry wrapped his arms about them and kissed her. His wife...

"She enjoyed herself." He said as he stroked one of Alice's chubby cheeks.

"I know – I don't think Ron stopped chasing her about till eight or nine."

"No wonder she is exhausted."

A beautiful moment of silence took them. Harry didn't like to break the silence but then remembered he had to tell her something.

"I got an owl from the ministry today. They want me to start working there – helping them after Voldemort and everything."

"When do you beginning?"

"I'm not going to take the position Ariana. I'm needed here."

"Not all day, every day you're not." She saw that he looked quite taken back. "Oh Harry, don't take that the wrong way my darling. It's just... we have months before – I want to live normal married life for a while. Harry, let me be a wife to you. Let me look after our child in the day and cook you dinner by night. After so long of being mad, I realise my biggest dream isn't for us to go away together as we planned to. But to live normally – if only for a short time. Please take the job Harry. Let's live normally." She pleaded.

He realized every word she said had been the truth. Unable to deny her, he grazed his lips against her cheek and nodded. "If that's what you want ... I'll owl the ministry tomorrow. I'll take the job."

"It is," she said as she looked at their child. Then, knowing she had the courage which could break at any given moment, she turned to him. "Harry I have one final wish – just one." He nodded.

Turning to face him she looked into his green eyes knowing what she was about to say would break her own heart.

“What is it?”

“Promise me...”

“Anything.”

“When I am gone, you mustn’t grieve forever. Harry, I broke Aberforth’s heart today.” She said as she swallowed down the lump and let tears spill over. “He waited his whole life to get me back; only to have me chose you over him in the end. He is such a good man, and would have made some woman a wonderful husband. But he waited for me instead. You mustn’t do the same.” She ordered him, wiping a tear off his cheek. “Love again without guilt, without shame. Remember me, but don’t live in memories of the past. I tried to. It doesn’t work.” She pushed her lips to his. “Live Harry. That’s my wish. I’m dying. But you’re not – and so must carry on when I am gone.”

Harry could say nothing in response; only kiss his dear, dear wife. Life after her seemed impossible. But then time travel was impossible.

They had always been living on borrowed time.

“You’re the love of my life. That, Ari, won’t ever change.”

They sat there until the embers burnt low in the fire and long after the steam had stopped rising off the hot chocolate.

Moonlight lit the room and still the family remain as they were, at least for a moment, frozen in time.

‘Should I draw you a picture of my heart? You would know with what indescribable pleasure I have seen so many scores of years roll over our heads. With an affection heightened and approved by time. Nor have the dreary years of absence in the smallest degree, effaced for my mind the image of that dear untitled man to whom I gave my heart. You could not be, nor did I wish to see you, an inactive spectator.’
Abigail to John Adams.

Please Review!

Epilogue

There were days at the beginning of those last six months when I truly thought they had got it wrong. I thought she would survive and prove them wrong. She had defied the odds so many times before, after all. All in all, my Ariana - my wife - had never seemed so well in herself or sound in her mind. She sang when she got up in the morning, chased our small daughter about the garden and remained affectionate and loving. I don't think I was ever so besotted with her.

The first two months were nothing short of blissful. I don't think even I noticed the days as they rolled over our heads. I went to work, and we lived a normal family life for a time, just as she had wished us too. I came home to find she had cooked my dinner. It felt weird, when every other woman I knew - Ginny, Hermione, Luna - was planning a career to be married to a girl who wanted nothing more than to stay home and take care of me. But that was the age she had been brought up on. And truly, I knew it was her heart's desire.

I said nothing about it.

In the middle of our third month together I came home to find her with Albus and Aberforth who she had to called to come over. She had been unwell in the day and unable to pick up Alice when she had cried - our daughter had grown too heavy for her weakened mother. And so for the following few weeks that I waited for her brothers to arrived before I left her to go to work.

But it was about this time I begun evidence of what the Healers had said. She struggled to get out of bed - took longer to dress; stopped eating so much. She got frustrated when she had to do everything the muggle way, but there was no magic left in her. Then I only worked in the morning - then just an afternoon. I wanted to spend more time with her. Whereas she would have vehemently protested in the early months, she soon relented as time wore on. Every second was precious. We watched Alice play while she lay on the sofa holding my hand lovingly. I knew she was drifting away from me.

A week before she died, she said goodbye to Alice, not wanting her to see her deteriorate further. She was unwell - even our then two

years old knew it. She kissed her, promised to watch over her and reminded her to be a good and dutiful daughter to me, as well as a loving niece to her uncle's. Then Alice went to stay with the Weasley's. My child would never see her mother's face light up when she came into the room again.

Between myself, Aberforth, Albus and Sirius we made sure she was comfortable in her final days. Ron and Hermione also helped. She was confused and dazed, but at other times she knew where, and who she was. She knew us too. And at the end, she kissed us all, called us by our names, smiled, reassured of us of her love and drifted away into an everlasting sleep that no madness could disturb.

I don't know or recall what happened next. The next week, month, year were the most horrible blur. The love of my life up till that point was gone. She had bounced back so many times before. That illness should at last defeat her seemed impossible. I lowered her into the ground with her brothers and Sirius by my side, our daughter in her godmother's arms.

It rained the day of the funeral.

Then – nothing.

One day, a storm swept through the village. The next day an owl came from the ministry. They wanted me to return to work... and I didn't feel angry that they wanted my life to go on without her in it. On the contra, I was ready to re-enter the world of the living. I could not live in my grief. I returned to it, and I remember it, but grief does not define the living.

I recalled what she said to me about Aberforth the night of our wedding. She was right. I had to go on.

Not so long after that I went to Ron and Hermione's own wedding.

I was standing in a corner with Sirius when I heard Alice start crying and then quite suddenly stop. Ginny in her bridesmaid dress had gone to my daughter's aid again, but Alice still asked on for me. So Ginny picked her up and put her on her hip. She walked towards me.

And the colour of her dress?

Lilac...

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"Come on, you two, stop it. It's your sister's big day!" said Ginny, comforting her children as they cried. Thank god Lily Luna was only a few months and didn't understand.

James and Albus did know what was happening though. As did Teddy, who would be following in Alice's footsteps the very next year.

"But I want to go with her!" James declared making Albus nod vigorously in agreement.

"Well you can't. At least not yet." she said as she turned her attention to the girl she thought of as her daughter even if she had not given birth to her.

"You never get the first year back, so you enjoy it. And we'll write to you, ok? Three letters a week, yes?"

Alice nodded. "Thanks mum."

Of course, she knew Ginny was not really her mother. But she had always been there. She loved her mother and respected her memory, but she loved Ginny too.

"Enjoy it." she said again as Alice turned to her granddad.

"Come here then, my little Gryffindor."

"Don't curse me!" insisted Alice.

"Oh you are going to have no trouble getting in to Gryffindor, don't even worry over it kid." said Sirius as he drew her close. "Me and dad put a surprise in your truck. Hope it comes in useful." he said kissing her once more as he let her go.

She gave him a quizzical look. In response, her granddad only winked.

Going over to Ron and Hermione, she kissed them and embraced both. While Hermione told her she was to study hard, Ron told her that she was to follow in her father's footsteps and get on the Quidditch team in the first year. She replied that she would try and that she would. They were left confused as to which response was to which question.

She kissed her siblings into turn and embraced, her best friend, Teddy Lupin.

"See you at Christmas." he nodded.

Turning to her father, she let him take her hand as he led her to the train. Normally she get embarrassed at him holding her – she was all grown up now at eleven, but she didn't think she cared just then.

Harry bent down and shook his head in gently disbelief. "When did my Alice Lily get so big and beautiful?"

She felt her eyes go hot and shrugged. Harry brushed her hair behind her shoulders before looking into those big blue eyes.

His child would never know how like her mother she truly was.

"I have a gift for you," he said as he reached into his pocket and took out a small stuffed grey goat. The toy looked old, but not neglected. It had been well loved by its previous owner. "This belonged to your mum. She was holding it first time I ever saw her. Don't doubt she that she would be proud of you. Ally, she loved you so much."

Taking the toy, she felt a smile spread over her face. It was as if she was taking a part of her mother with her.

"I wish she was here."

“So do I baby, so do I.” he nodded. The two embraced, breathed one another in and he kissed her head. He couldn’t believe she was going to be away for three whole months! They hadn’t been separated for that long since he had gone searching for the Horcruxs. “I love you, and so does she. Christmas will come real soon.” he promised. “And remember, you’ll see Uncle Aberforth tonight. He’s persuaded old McGonagall to let him have a seat at the head table. He’ll be there when your sorted.” she nodded, more confident now she knew her beloved uncle would be present when she put on the hat.

“I love you dad.”

“I love you too. Now scoot kid. It’s nearly eleven.”

With one last look at her family, she waved and got on board the train. Hogwarts was waiting.

Later that evening, for the first time since she was baby, she re-entered the Gryffindor Tower.

This was where her granddad Percival had studied. This was where Uncle Albus had read. This was where Lily and James had fought. This was where the Marauders had plotted.

It was where her parents fell in love.

She had come home.

Going up to bed that night, she opened her trunk. The first thing she did was put pictures of her family up, including one of her, her father and the three Dumbledore siblings at her parents wedding. That was her favourite one, for she was in her mother’s arms.

Searching for what Sirius had meant, she soon came across he had put in her trunk.

She should have known; she had certainly hoped that when the time came it would pass into her keeping ...Going over to the bed with the old bit of parchment, she pulled out her brand new wand, pointed it to the parchment and grinned.

Alice Lily, daughter of Ariana and Harry, proceeded to make that immortal oath for the first time. It had been near an entire decade since one of the descendents of the Marauders had been at Hogwarts. Then, with a smile on her face and with hope in her heart, Alice solemnly swore that she was up to no good.

The End.

Author note: I hope you liked the ending. I feel it was the right one. As much as I would have loved for Ariana to have grown old with Harry, I think what she did to Kendra would have eaten away at her. In a way she did get her fairy tale ending. She had a child and married the man she loved, was freed of the magic that tormented her and was then reunited with her parents. In my head, she's resting peacefully now.

As for the others, Harry married Ginny (but loves her differently to how he loved Ari, not less – just differently). They had the kids, earlier than in Canon as they already had Ally. Aberforth is at the pub with the goats, having very slowly recovered for Ari's death – he now dotes furiously on Ally instead. Albus was right – he died a year after his sister, having made his peace with her. Sirius remained as close to Harry as ever, but also helped his cousin raise Teddy.

So there could possibly be a few one shots or a mini fic about Andy/Teddy/Sirius. I think it'd be fun.

As I said, I hope you are as satisfied with the end as I am. I like leavings things on a high – and Alice having the map left me happy, she now has an entire castle to explore and lessons to attend. I think she would grow up into quite a cool little witch.

Anyway, now I'm prattling on. I feel rather emotional about the ending. This story has been two years and a day in the making. I don't think I have got attached to any story as much as I did this one – it was my first plot bunny after DH. Suffice to say, I shall miss it very much and expect to return to the Dumbledore's in the future.

But for now, I'm going to give them a break.

Lastly, but most importantly, thank you all without exception for reading and reviewing. It has been much appreciated and you guys made the story for me. I humbly ask for a last review, for the ending.

Once again a huge thanks to you all.

Cuddles and Cookies,

Jess.